

KASSERINE PASS BATTLES



Readings Volume I, Part 1



U.S. ARMY
CENTER OF MILITARY HISTORY

Foreword

The Kasserine Pass battles fought by the U.S. II Corps in Tunisia between 30 January and 25 February 1943 offer valuable lessons for commanders preparing to take units into combat. One facet of this preparation involves the reading of written historical accounts. Yet commanders realize that ground combat is so complex and fast-paced that they doubt the historian's ability to capture its essence in smooth-flowing narrative. They also know that participants seldom grasp the Big Picture and often lack the eloquence and opportunity to tell their stories. At this century's beginning, Lt. Gen. Sir Ian Hamilton summarized the problem of battle history in the Preface to his own observer's diary of the Russo-Japanese War, *A Staff Officer's Scrap Book*. Frequently seen as a short quote, the longer text of his 1905 comment is more apropos:

If facts are hurriedly issued, fresh from the mint of battle, they cannot be expected to supply an account which is either well balanced or exhaustive. On the other hand, it is equally certain that, when once the fight has been fairly lost or won, it is the tendency of all ranks to combine and recast the story of their achievement into a shape which shall satisfy the susceptibilities of national and regimental vain-glory. It is then already too late for the painstaking historian to set to work. He may record the orders given and the movements which ensued, and he may build hopes and fears which dictated those orders, and to the spirit and method in which those movements were executed, he has for ever lost the clue. On the actual day of battle naked truths may be picked up for the asking; by the following morning they have already begun to get into their uniform.

Hamilton's warning heeded, we publish here the *Kasserine Pass Battles*, a selection of American and German unit histories, operational reports, and war diary extracts, together with relevant supporting doctrines and lessons learned. These primary materials provide no perfect accounting of orders, movements, and engagements, as no set of documents, however carefully crafted, can record all of the vagaries of combat. But they provide a common framework to analyze battle where only battle can be analyzed--not in the library but on the ground, and not with a scholar's skepticism for contrasting written claims but with a soldier's eye for terrain and how men and machine fight on it.

Take these documents to the ground with you. Compare them with published accounts and make your own assessments. What you will gain is better than settling a scholar's argument over footnotes or details. What you will gain is an insight into how men fight.

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Preface

The *Kasserine Pass Battles*, organized in two volumes, supports the 1st Armored Division Staff Ride in Tunisia. Volume I, *Readings*, contains selected extracts of American operational reports, unit histories, and personal accounts, as well as German war diaries, covering the period of major actions from 30 January to 25 February 1943. The documents are arranged chronologically to match both the time and movement of the battles from east to west. Forty-one maps and sketches form an appendix. By no means a complete account, this volume provides staff ride participants a documentary framework for analyzing the events as they travel to the more than twenty-five vantage points within the battle area.

Volume II, *Doctrines and Lessons Learned*, contains excerpts of American doctrinal manuals concerning the employment of armor, along with technical information on American and German weapons and vehicles. Rounding out this volume are lessons learned published by major headquarters, as well as insights from Maj. Gen. Omar N. Bradley's investigation of the Kasserine battles and those from Maj. Gen. Ernest N. Harmon's notes as commander of the 1st and 2d Armored Divisions in Algeria, Tunisia, and Italy.

Take these volumes to the field. The maps and sketches can be used there, and the documents make good reading during travel time.

The documents were selected for publication from thousands of pages of primary materials. The intelligence information on the subject is also voluminous, so the staff ride leader will summarize intelligence as it was then known, to include the higher-level ULTRA picture available to the senior Allied commanders and the use of SIGINT information available to the German commanders.

Such key topics as the human equation, command styles, the doctrine and tactics used by the opposing forces, air support, and the effect of the Kasserine battles on the U.S. Army will be discussed by both the staff ride leader and the staff ride director.

The Center of Military History will publish staff ride guidebooks to the Kasserine Pass and other battles in Tunisia in 1993 to provide veterans and students of military history the opportunity not only to view the documents generated by battle but also to study battles where they occurred.

We hope that you find the Kasserine Staff Ride both enjoyable and professionally rewarding.

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Kasserine Pass, 30 January–22 February 1943

MARTIN BLUMENSON

When World War II opened in Europe in September 1939, the U.S. Army lacked the capacity to wage modern warfare. Although many dedicated individual professional soldiers had during the 1920s and 1930s conscientiously studied to be ready for the next war, decline, neglect, and stagnation marked America's military forces. As the Army's strength decreased, its potential to function decayed. Whether this "tragically insufficient" establishment was capable of restoring itself quickly in a time of emergency became questionable.¹ The Army, which had shrunk in size between 1919 and the mid-1930s, was unable to absorb new techniques of waging war. Equipment deteriorated continuously as World War I stocks were used up. Personnel shortages brought Regular Army training to a standstill in 1934. The Army still "had ample time to rebuild itself, but no money." Without adequate funds, raising a credible Army and concluding contracts for modern materiel were impossible. Several years later, the Army received "more money, but time . . . was lacking."²

Several circumstances accounted for the Army's weakness. Victory in World War I had bred complacency and inhibited imaginative ideas and experiments in doctrine, organization, and materiel. A revulsion against war in general and disillusionment with World War I in particular, together with faith in the oceans as bulwarks of protection, had prompted retreat into national isolation and desire to avoid foreign entanglements. Because of the great economic depression, congressional appropriations had dwindled, manpower had declined, and the development and procurement of weapons and equipment had languished. Even after World War II began in Europe, the American public had remained lethargic toward military issues. A "large and expensive combat-ready military structure" could not be supported, and "for two decades after 1920 the Army and the National Guard together were quite incapable of waging war."³ As Japanese aggression in Asia and as German

and, to a lesser extent, Italian preparations for war and expansion in Europe created international tensions, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Congress gave some attention to military problems and allowed increased expenditures. Yet General Malin Craig, the U.S. Army chief of staff, wondered whether a renaissance might be too late. In the summer of 1939, he warned that at least two years were required to transform funds into military power. "Time is the only thing," he said, "that may be irrevocably lost."⁴

At the outbreak of the war in Europe, the U.S. Army was still seriously undermanned and underequipped, practiced obsolete procedures with outmoded weapons, and from 1933 ranked seventeenth in size among the armies of the world. The actual strength of the Regular Army in 1939 totaled fewer than 190,000 troops, who were scattered, usually in battalions, among 130 posts, camps, and stations. Although Craig's successor, General George C. Marshall, predicted the impossibility of expanding and modernizing the establishment overnight, that was exactly what the Army would have to do.⁵ How well the Army had performed the task of rehabilitating itself would become apparent in February 1943 during a series of engagements in Tunisia that came to be known as the Battle of Kasserine Pass.

Rapid demobilization after World War I had left the Regular Army with 130,000 men on 1 January 1920.⁶ The National Defense Act of that year authorized 280,000 active-duty soldiers, but Congress reduced the number to 150,000 regulars in 1922, to 135,000 in the following year, and to 118,750 in 1927. The National Guard, with a ceiling of 450,000 members, rarely totaled half that number, while about 100,000 officers and men, receiving at best indifferent attention, formed the Organized Reserve Corps.⁷ Consisting of 110,000 men in 1936, the standing Army lacked airplanes, tanks, combat and scout cars, antiaircraft artillery guns, searchlights, fire-control equipment, .50-caliber machine guns, and other vital materiel. The United States "on its own initiative had rendered itself more impotent than Germany under the military limitations of the Treaty of Versailles."⁸ Authorized a 165,000-member Regular Army in 1937, and a 210,000 level in 1939, the U.S. Army was without a single division prepared for combat.

The experience of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) in France in 1918, particularly the final phase, largely determined Army doctrine during the interwar years. Offensive operations had featured large and heavy artillery preparations, barrages timed to move forward on successive lines ahead of the infantry assault, use of tanks to assist infantry through the barbed wire and across enemy trenches, and massive advance of infantry to engage in hand-to-hand combat with the enemy. The National Defense Act of 1920 confirmed refighting "the *old* kind of war" in the future.⁹ Proficiency in the rifle and bayonet used in open and fluid rather than in static warfare and the efficacy of the "headlong attack" were basic doctrinal beliefs.¹⁰ Infantry advancing to

“engage and destroy the enemy by physical encounter” was the key to victory in battle. Despite the emergence of machine guns, automotive transportation, tanks, planes, and other developments, the rifle remained the most important weapon. Doctrine relegated aircraft, tanks, machine guns, and artillery to employment as auxiliary arms for the infantry and at the same time proclaimed adherence to offensive and aggressive tactics.¹¹

Tanks had formed a separate component in the AEF, and four battalions, all using French and British models, participated in battle, but the National Defense Act of 1920 placed tanks under infantry control. This reinforced the idea of gearing tanks’ forward movement to the pace of the infantry soldier. Tanks became in effect self-propelled artillery pieces to assist the infantry advance. The Army built thirty-five between 1920 and 1935, most of them test models, and the first standard model adopted in 1938 represented no doctrinal change. Tanks continued as infantry-support weapons.¹² The horse cavalry continued to have an eminent place in doctrine, not only for reconnaissance and communications but more especially for pursuit. In search of traditional mobility but prohibited from developing tanks, the cavalry experimented with light armored cars but made little progress because of endemic penury and meager manpower.¹³ All the combat arms tried to gain mechanized vehicles—those used in combat—and motorized vehicles—those used for transportation—but the efforts withered. Motorization for artillery was deemed to be “madness.” Attempts to organize and establish a mechanized force in 1928 and again in 1930–31 failed.¹⁴

The Army Air Corps, practicing a variety of functions and missions, turned increasingly to strategic bombardment and neglected close tactical support of ground forces. “Air Corps infatuation with the heavy bomber and strategic air power” resulted in “a reasonably good bomber . . . but no similarly adequate fighters and attack planes to support surface battles.”¹⁵ The doctrinal coordination of ground and air action was primitive. The artillery gave thought to centralizing the control of gunfire, both for direct and indirect firing, and also to the use of forward observers. Lack of resources, particularly communications equipment and manpower, inhibited solid development of these new techniques.¹⁶ Except for conversations among thoughtful officers and some small tactical experimentation in the field, doctrine remained relatively unchanged between the wars. Lacking the means to try new procedures, the Army kept alive its stress on offensive and aggressive operations. As late as the summer of 1939, the Army was “still attuned to the combat styles of 1918.”¹⁷

Realistic exercises to train and test individual soldier, unit, and combined-arms proficiency, to practice procedures in the field, to disseminate knowledge, to stimulate air-ground cooperation, to give officers experience in handling large organizations—in short, to achieve war readiness—were out of the question for most of the interwar period because of the stringent economy

in defense expenditures, the low peacetime strengths of the Regular Army, the National Guard, and the Organized Reserve Corps, and the dispersal of the few divisions in existence.¹⁸ In overseas posts—Hawaii, Panama, and the Philippines—units could concentrate for periodic war games, but the three regular infantry divisions in the continental United States were so scattered that it was difficult and costly to bring together divisional components for training. Not until the latter part of the 1930s did maneuvers involve at least a corps headquarters and two or more divisions.¹⁹ The imposition of nonmilitary duties also detracted from serious attention to training. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), created in 1933 to give work to unemployed young men, came under Army administration, and this responsibility diverted officers and men from drill.²⁰ Units of an under-strength National Guard and members of the Organized Reserve Corps gathered once a week in armories and spent two weeks of the summer in the field every year to work with obsolete equipment in very short supply. The training was rudimentary. The primary function of the National Guard was to be ready at the behest of state governors to help maintain public order during natural disasters and civil strife. While duty of this sort built unit cohesion, it was less than valuable as wartime preparation.

The War Department created four field armies in 1932, and, although they “existed only on paper,” the department gave them primary responsibility to train the units in their areas.²¹ Four years later, in 1936, no corps headquarters troops and few army headquarters troops existed. As late as 1939, the First Army had two officers serving as permanent headquarters staff members. No wonder that the First Army, in a major exercise in 1935, could do no more than test the assembly of 36,000 troops. The Third Army staged an exercise in 1938 involving 24,000 troops, and the outcome, according to its commander, proved the continuing usefulness of the horse cavalry. In 1939, the First Army conducted a series of exercises for about 50,000 troops, actually a collection of individual organizations without supporting units. At 23 percent of authorized war strength, the force had no 155-mm howitzers, was short in antitank weapons, had on hand 6 percent of its infantry mortars, 33 percent of its machine guns, and 17 percent of its trucks. One river crossing used up more than half the engineer pontoon equipment available to the entire U.S. Army. The outcome of the maneuver, according to the commander, proved the continuing utility of the World War I square-type infantry division.²²

That these exercises proved the validity of concepts already outmoded indicated the nature of the maneuver problems and the methods in the field for solving them. By 1939, the Army had virtually forgotten how to conduct training on a broad scale. Very few officers could handle organizations larger than a battalion. Advanced officers’ courses in the branch schools were generally stereotyped and routine, although the temporary association of

young officers, presumably the best of their generations, provoked discussion among them and stimulated professional reading.²³ The two-year course at the Command and General Staff College stressed solving military problems by the "school solution," and although the practice stifled initiative and originality, it did produce officers who were "standard" in thought processes, who were at home and at ease in any headquarters and unit. Early in the postwar period, the college taught what was called the latest tactical doctrine of World War I. New tactics and techniques of the separate arms, as well as of the combined arms, found places in the curriculum by 1929, mechanization and motorization were taught beginning in 1935, and the employment of the mechanized division received attention in the following year, all on a highly theoretical basis.²⁴ The Army War College offered lectures by military and civilian experts, expected students to read and to do research, and had them solve more or less realistic problems derived from history and theory, individually as well as by committee. The final exercise, visiting the principal Civil War battlefields in Virginia and Pennsylvania in order to follow the operations of the armies, corps, and divisions, indicated a persistent concern with the past.

Standard weapons and equipment were of World War I vintage: the Springfield Model 1903 rifle throughout the Army (although the M1 Garand semiautomatic rifle was in limited production by 1939), the 75-mm and 155-mm howitzers for the artillery; the .50-caliber machine gun for antitank and anti-aircraft use (although the 37-mm gun was being produced by 1939), and the Stokes three-inch trench mortar for the infantry (although 60-mm and 81-mm mortars were being developed by 1939). About a thousand tanks were left over from World War I, and in 1934, only twelve postwar tanks were in service. All the tanks on hand were lightly armed and armored. Walter Christie built a tank with a new suspension system and with interchangeable wheels and tracks, but the Army purchased only a few experimental models.²⁵

The organization of the War Department General Staff fostered compartmentalization and inhibited the use of combined arms. Chiefs of infantry, cavalry, and artillery presided over more or less autonomous branches and discouraged interaction and mutual experimentation. The basic combat organization was the infantry division, nonmotorized, structured as in World War I with two brigades, each of two regiments of four battalions each. Toward the end of the 1930s, some students and faculty members at the Army War College recommended reducing the size of the division in order to enhance mobility and flexibility. At least one student committee suggested abolishing the brigade level of command. From 1936 on, Lesley J. McNair, first at Fort Sill, later at Fort Leavenworth, worked out a blueprint to streamline the square-type division to triangular shape, not only to attain mobility and flexibility, but also to gain personnel for corps and army

headquarters troops and support units. Nothing would come of this before 1939.*

A start toward mechanization occurred in 1928 with the formation of an experimental organization composed of two tank battalions, an armored cavalry troop, an infantry battalion, an artillery battalion, engineer and signal companies, a medical detachment, an ammunition train, and a squadron of observation planes. The provisional force was broken up after three months for lack of funds. While the infantry branch did little to further armored warfare, the cavalry developed "combat cars" (light tanks) and in 1932 activated the 7th Cavalry Brigade (Mechanized).²⁶ In the summer of 1939, the combat forces of the U.S. Army consisted of three embryonic infantry divisions at half strength and six others consisting of skeleton cadres; two cavalry divisions, each totaling about 1,200 men; the 7th Cavalry Brigade (Mechanized) at half strength; several assorted regiments; and 17,000 airmen using obsolete planes.²⁷

The U.S. Army chiefs of staff in the 1920s and 1930s—Generals Peyton March, John J. Pershing, John Hines, Charles P. Summerall, Jr., Douglas MacArthur, and Malin Craig—struggled to modernize the Army. Their efforts were in vain because of the lack of general public interest and the scarcity of funds. On the intermediate and lower levels, military life during the greater part of the interwar period was generally one of stultification. The prerogative of seniority brought older officers to important positions, and many lacked energy and stamina, looked with satisfaction on the achievements of World War I, and were cautious and conservative in their outlook. Yet a group of younger professionals was studying the art of war, reading military journals and books, and seeking to prepare themselves for combat; a surprising number would attain prominence in positions of great responsibility during World War II. It was a wonder that these officers serving "in the dullness of a skeletonized army" emerged in the 1940s as brilliant administrators and leaders.²⁸

The state of affairs on the other side was quite different. The Germans after World War I, restricted by the Treaty of Versailles to an army of 100,000 men, turned this force into a professional cadre capable of quick expansion in time of war. Seeking military reasons for their defeat, maintaining their tradition of studying the lessons of the past to apply them to the future, and determined to be ready for modern warfare, the Germans, who had had but a few tanks in the Great War, restored mobility to the battlefield. They developed armored warfare according to the precepts of J. F. C. Fuller and B. H. Liddell Hart and created a doctrine of *blitzkrieg* (lightning war) founded on the principles of the so-called Hutier tactics, that is, to exploit quickly penetra-

* The 2d Infantry Division was triangularized in 1937 for field tests, but on completion of the exercises it returned to its original organization.

tions of the enemy line by avoiding centers of resistance and striking deeply into the rear in order to paralyze communications. Civil flying and glider enthusiasts formed nuclei for a resuscitated air force, which concentrated on lending close tactical support to the ground forces.

The rise to power of Adolf Hitler in 1933 gave immediacy to a well-integrated program of militarization beyond Versailles Treaty limits. A gigantic industrial renaissance, in large part intended to overcome economic depression, provided weapons and equipment for an army increasing in numbers and in skill. By 1936, the German Army and Air Force were strong and well trained; intervention in the Spanish Civil War tested doctrine, weapons, equipment, and organization and gave experience to those who took part. The apparently united will of the German people to restore the former power of Germany complemented astounding progress in the art of war. Although German military leaders felt themselves unready for general war before 1942, the successes of Hitler's diplomacy in the 1930s—in the Rhineland, Austria, and Czechoslovakia—stilled their reservations. German victories in Poland, Denmark, Norway, and Western Europe in 1939 and 1940 were astonishing. The German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, although promising quick success, bogged down because of the enormous distances, contradictory objectives, and, eventually, the winter weather.

The Italians shared with Benito Mussolini dreams of restoring the glory of ancient Rome. Although the Italian ground forces succeeded in Ethiopia against a primitive foe, Italian participation in the Spanish Civil War and the later 1941 thrust from Albania into Greece showed deficiencies in organization, weapons, equipment, and leadership, perhaps partially the result of a lack of the natural resources, particularly oil, required for modern war. A few elite units were first rate, but many Italian formations reflected the general corruption of the state system. The Italian Army in North Africa, specifically in Libya, had light, under-powered tanks and trucks, World War I artillery pieces, old-fashioned antitank and antiaircraft guns, and obsolete rifles and machine guns.²⁹

The Germans and Italians fought a coalition war under the disadvantageous lack of a coalition machinery to translate policy on the highest level into strategy. The two allies cooperated through loosely organized, complicated, and often poorly defined and ineffective diplomatic and special liaison arrangements. Although the two dictators, Hitler and Mussolini, occasionally met, they fought parallel wars. German aid, in the form of troops, weapons, equipment, supplies, and leadership, was necessary to sustain the Italian effort, and this bred German feelings of superiority, disdain, even contempt for Italy as well as an Italian sense of inferiority and jealousy. The Axis war was poorly directed, and the inability to synchronize activities was made evident in the Battle of Kasserine Pass.

On 1 September 1939, on the same day that Germany invaded Poland, Gen. George C. Marshall became U.S. Army Chief of Staff.³⁰ He immediately implemented policies to retire older officers, reassign those who were incompetent, and bring younger and more energetic men to responsible positions.³¹ A week after the German invasion, President Roosevelt raised the authorized strength of the Regular Army to 227,000 men and the National Guard to 235,000 and permitted members of the Organized Reserve Corps to volunteer for active duty. The War Department that fall, in accordance with McNair's plans, reduced the size of the infantry division and reorganized it from a square to a triangular type, giving it three infantry regiments consisting of three battalions each. The gain in manpower as a result of triangularization, as well as the influx of men into the Regular Army and National Guard, enabled the War Department to hold genuine corps and army maneuvers in the spring of 1940, the first full-fledged corps maneuvers since 1918.

The task of attaining war preparedness began seriously in 1940 as larger and more realistic exercises and maneuvers developed and refined new doctrine, techniques, and equipment. In January 1940, the Fourth Army Headquarters laid out an unprecedented amphibious exercise involving Army, Navy, and Air Corps elements. Fourteen thousand participating troops of the 3d Division moved by water from Tacoma, Washington, landed on the shore of Monterey Bay, California, and "captured" San Francisco.³² Maneuvers in Georgia and Louisiana in April and May 1940 tested new types of corps headquarters directing triangular infantry divisions. At the same time, the 7th Mechanized Cavalry Brigade and the infantry's Provisional Motorized Tank Brigade came together to form an improvised armored division. Recommendations from these exercises included combining the regimental artillery battalions of an infantry division under the central control of a division artillery, expanding the mechanized brigade into an armored division, and creating a second armored division.³³

Spurring these developments was the phenomenal success of the German *blitzkrieg* in France in May and June, which produced consternation, then defeatism and apathy, in the War Department. How could the German tanks be stopped? Marshall dispelled the gloom with two positive decisions. He established the Armored Force, whose mission was to match the power of German mobile forces. He directed his planners to provide antitank defense of an offensive nature to halt the enemy's massed armor.³⁴

The Armored Force, under Brig. Gen. Adna R. Chaffee, came into being in July 1940. The I Armored Corps, with two divisions under its command—the 1st at Fort Knox, Kentucky, the 2d at Fort Benning, Georgia—supervised training. Both armored divisions were formed with a reconnaissance battalion and an armored brigade, the latter consisting of two regiments of light tanks armed with the 37-mm gun, a regiment of medium tanks armed with the short-barreled 75-mm gun, an infantry regiment of two

battalions, a field-artillery regiment, plus an additional field-artillery battalion, an engineer battalion, and signal, ordnance, quartermaster, and medical units.³⁵

Activated on 15 July 1940 with Regular Army personnel later augmented by draftees, the 1st Armored Division, which would see action in the Battle of Kasserine Pass, pioneered the development of tank gunnery and used forward-observer fire-direction techniques developed after World War I. By 1941, although shortages of all sorts existed—for example, only sixty-six medium tanks produced in the United States were on hand—the 1st Armored Division was able to participate in the Louisiana and Carolinas maneuvers. The units engaged in simulated battle during daylight and night hours, practiced maintenance, performed logistics and administration, and lived in field conditions.³⁶

Both armored divisions participated in the Louisiana maneuvers in September 1941. Involving 400,000 troops, pitting for the first time one field army against another, featuring armored and paratroop forces, assembling the unheard-of number of more than 1,000 aircraft, the exercises demonstrated “an unusual amount of experimentation.”³⁷ The foremost purposes were to fight large-unit battles, to test motorized and mechanized techniques, to foster air-ground cooperation, and to practice medical evacuation, demolitions, reconnaissance, and intelligence.³⁸ In the Carolinas in October and November, the training exercises were a major test of the 1st and 2d Armored Divisions. A total of 865 tanks and armored scout cars opposed 4,320 guns effective against tanks. The results were inconclusive, and no firm doctrine could be enunciated and written, mainly because of shortages in authorized strength and weapons in all the participating units. Missing were 10 percent of the mortars, 40 percent of the 37-mm guns, 18 percent of the 155-mm howitzers, and 87 percent of the .50-caliber machine guns.³⁹

Clearly, features of the armored division required modification. When Chaffee took ill, Lt. Gen. Jacob L. Devers replaced him as chief of the Armored Force on 1 August 1941. An artilleryman, Devers improved firepower. Maj. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr., commanding the I Armored Corps, stressed mobility. Together they gave the armored divisions better balance.⁴⁰ On 1 March 1942, as Maj. Gen. Orlando Ward, who had commanded the 1st Armored Brigade in the Louisiana and Carolinas maneuvers, took command of the 1st Armored Division, a drastic reorganization of the Armored Division was under way. In order to gain flexibility, the brigade headquarters was eliminated and replaced by two combat commands. Each combat command had its own intelligence and operations capabilities but depended on the division for logistics and administration. Three separate self-propelled field-artillery battalions operated under the division artillery. The division trains controlled the service elements. A higher proportion of infantry to tanks was achieved by increasing the number of battalions in the

infantry regiment to three and by reducing the number of tank regiments from three to two regiments of three battalions each. A total of 14,620 troops manned the division, which was equipped with .30-caliber carbines, self-propelled and towed antitank guns, self-propelled assault guns, .30- and .50-caliber machine guns, 105-mm self-propelled howitzers, 60-mm and 81-mm mortars, light and medium tanks, armored and scout cars, and half-tracks. Unfortunately, much equipment was lacking.⁴¹

Before the 1st Armored Division could train in its new form, it received a massive infusion of recently inducted replacement troops, bringing the division to authorized strength, and went to Fort Dix in April 1942 for shipment overseas. Overage officers were relieved and replaced, and the division sailed for Northern Ireland in May and trained there for five months. The stress was on small-unit training and gunnery. The work improved tank-artillery cooperation, but tank-infantry and air-ground cooperation remained weak.⁴²

In November 1942, the 1st Armored Division embarked in ships again, this time for a voyage to North Africa and the eventual engagement of Kasserine Pass. It would go into battle with two battalions of light tanks armed with the 37-mm gun, three battalions of medium tanks armed with the low-velocity 75-mm gun, and one battalion of early-model Sherman medium tanks. The “relative weakness in armor and fire power when compared with the German tanks was not suspected until they met in Tunisia.”⁴³

To stop German massed armor, the War Department created the tank destroyer, so named to connote offensive and aggressive characteristics as opposed to the defensive and passive meaning of “antitank.” A “marriage of the artillery gun to truck and tractor,” the tank destroyer was to embody an aggressive spirit and to destroy enemy tanks by maneuver and fire.⁴⁴ To create an ideal tank destroyer with mobility and punch, quickly and easily fired and giving the crew protection against small-arms fire, was a difficult task. From a 37-mm gun mounted on a quarter-ton truck or jeep, the tank destroyer evolved to a 57-mm then 75-mm, 76-mm, and finally 90-mm gun mounted on a carriage resembling a tank.

During maneuvers in August 1940, the employment of antitank guns, manned by antitank companies in the infantry regiments, was passive; they were deployed in cordon defense. A year later, bringing the companies together under central control proved a more satisfactory practice for offensive, aggressive movements in large-scale exercises. Yet observers noted tendencies to commit the guns prematurely and to fragment their strength. In November 1941, the War Department projected activating fifty-three tank-destroyer battalions, and a month later, eight infantry antitank battalions were redesignated tank-destroyer battalions. Tank destroyers became a provisional branch with a Tactical and Firing Center to supervise organization and training. Not until August 1942 when Camp Hood, Texas, opened,

did a thoroughly rounded program begin. A tank-destroyer field manual published in June 1942 developed the motto "Seek, Strike, Destroy." The first officers candidate class graduated in October. By then, tank-destroyer battalions were attached and later assigned to divisions. The War Department planned to activate a total of 222 battalions.

The antitank rocket launcher called the bazooka, a grenade with a new tail assembly, came into existence in mid-1942. It was recommended for issue to tank-destroyer battalions. Training in its use started in December 1942. That was too late for the units already overseas, and bazookas were issued to troops already in Tunisia and to soldiers aboard ships. However, no one really knew how to operate and employ them.⁴⁵

By far the most important entity dealing with mobilization, organization, and training came into being in July 1940. This was General Headquarters, U.S. Army, known as GHQ, modeled on Pershing's AEF headquarters. U.S. Army Chief of Staff Marshall named Brigadier General McNair, then commandant of the Command and General Staff College, to be his chief of staff at GHQ and gave him a free hand to fashion the combat units into a proficient fighting force. GHQ was inserted structurally between the War Department General Staff and the four field armies, which had formerly conducted training. Although army commanders were initially reluctant to relinquish their training function, McNair quickly established a standard system progressive in nature, that is, a regular training cycle from the recruit through the unit to combined-arms teams.

After the German spring campaigns in Denmark and Western Europe in 1940, the president raised the Regular Army to 280,000 men, then to 375,000. In September, authorized to do so by the Congress, he enlarged the Regular Army to 500,000 troops and called the 270,000 men of the National Guard into active federal service for a year. The Selective Service Act in the same month permitted the induction of 630,000 draftees into uniform. This gave the Army a strength of 1.4 million troops.⁴⁶ The absence of sufficient housing, mess, and training facilities in the camps, posts, and stations made it impossible to transfer the eighteen National Guard divisions to federal status at once, and they came on active duty over the space of a year. By mid-1941, almost 1.5 million men had been mobilized, assigned to units, and were engaged in all forms of training.⁴⁷ The National Guard divisions were restructured into triangular shape and brought to full authorized strength. Commanders and staff officers who owed their appointments to state politics and who were less than qualified on grounds of military education or physical conditioning were removed and replaced by Regular Army officers. Complicating the massive mobilization and training experience were the activation of new divisions and other units, revisions in tables of organization and equipment, the adoption of newly developed weapons—examples were the tank destroyers, the replacement beginning in 1940 of World War I-type 3-

inch mortars by the 60-mm and 81-mm mortars, the issue of the M1 semiautomatic Garand rifle after 1941—and the acceptance of new combat doctrine. That the entire process did not collapse into chaos bordered on the miraculous.⁴⁸

McNair set into motion, inspected, and critiqued a variety of exercises to test proficiency and identify failures in the training programs. For example, the critique of a First Army maneuver in August 1940 noted such important errors as improper use of combat teams and motor transportation, inability to reconnoiter and maintain contact between adjacent units, and deficiencies in signal communication, antitank guns, ammunition supply, and medical evacuation. All National Guard units, in particular, reflected inadequate training. Many officers and men were physically soft and undisciplined; many headquarters, particularly signal, military police, ordnance, engineer, and medical, were nonexistent; and weapons and equipment were in extremely short supply. GHQ maneuvers in Tennessee in early 1941 showed the troops still road bound, ignorant of field manuals, unable to reconnoiter properly, and generally deficient in basic- and small-unit training; leadership was weak and unable to coordinate with adjacent and supporting units and with units of other branches.⁴⁹

The apex of McNair's training efforts came at the Louisiana and Carolinas maneuvers in 1941. Testing army aviation, GHQ found it poorly coordinated with ground action. Ground troops underestimated air potential, were weak in liaison and communications, had inadequate combat intelligence, and were guilty of dispersed and fragmented efforts. There was a general lack of discipline, an unwillingness to move off the roads, and a reluctance to break column formations.⁵⁰ Yet the results of the Louisiana maneuvers of 1941 confirmed "the soundness of existing policies."⁵¹ The major lesson of the Carolinas maneuvers was "the crying need for infantry support, both within the [armored] division and between infantry and armored divisions."⁵² Both maneuvers accelerated the creation of independent tank battalions to work with infantry. A light plane, the Cub, for artillery spotting began to be built in 1942. What no one seemed to notice was how the air service had thwarted the War Department's efforts to create air support of ground forces. No procedures or command relationships existed for large-scale air-ground operations.⁵³

At the end of November 1941, just a few days before the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and brought the United States into the war, McNair judged whether the troops were ready for combat. They "could fight effectively," he said, but "losses would be unduly heavy." Against the Germans, he added prophetically, the results "might not be all that could be desired."⁵⁴ There had simply not been enough time for training. At the time of Pearl Harbor, 1,638,000 men were in Army uniform, but only a single division and a single antiaircraft artillery regiment were on full war footing.⁵⁵

“Though a large Army was not ready for combat . . . the United States entered the war . . . with a training program carefully thought out and in full operation.”⁵⁶ GHQ training principles included progression through a four-phase sequence, tests in each phase, unit training with frequent review, free maneuvers, immediate critiques, the goal of general combat proficiency, integration of the tactical units, a stress on the responsibilities of commanding officers at all levels, and an emphasis on battle realism.⁵⁷ In line with the last principle, GHQ established the Desert Training Center in California and Arizona early in 1942. There, in a primitive environment, troops lived, moved, and fought under simulated battle conditions.⁵⁸

Beginning in December 1940, the War Department abolished the traditional two-year course at Leavenworth and instead offered short, special, and refresher instruction to selected commanders and staff officers who were scheduled to assume positions of major responsibility in new units. The Army discontinued the War College course and assigned faculty and staff members to the War Plans Division of the War Department General Staff and elsewhere.⁵⁹ GHQ itself went out of existence in March 1942. The War Department abolished the branch chiefs and formed the Army Ground Forces under McNair to continue training combat forces. Earlier maneuvers had focused on testing equipment and training, but large-scale exercises in 1942 tested doctrine, particularly infantry-armor coordination, which improved, and air-ground cooperation, which remained disappointing.⁶⁰ Unfortunately, the two major units that would fight at Kasserine Pass, the 1st Armored Division and the 34th Infantry Division, did not take part in the 1942 exercises, for they were in Northern Ireland. As late as July 1942, the 1st Armored Division was still awaiting delivery of much equipment, and the 34th Division, which had just started training for amphibious landing, had few antiaircraft guns and no tanks.⁶¹ The tank destroyers with these divisions had light 37-mm guns and light armored cars. Antiaircraft artillery units were shipped overseas after attaining only “minimum proficiency in their weapons and before receiving combat training with other ground arms or with aviation.” Because of the wide dispersion of training centers and the insufficiency of planes to tow targets for firing practice, antiaircraft personnel were quite simply “improperly trained.”⁶²

The 34th Infantry Division, the first American division to go to Europe, originated in the National Guard. It was chosen for overseas service presumably because it was deemed to be well trained. Among its major organic components was the 168th Infantry regiment, which had had a typical prewar military upbringing and would be involved in the Battle of Kasserine Pass.⁶³ The 168th had participated as an Iowa volunteer unit in the Civil War, specifically in Grant’s campaign against Vicksburg and in the later movement of the Union Army through the Carolinas. Mobilized again in 1917, the regiment fought in France as part of the 42d Rainbow Division. Members in

the 1920s and 1930s were proud of the unit’s combat history and had a special feeling of cohesion. Of northern European stock, the men were from the towns of Atlantic, Council Bluffs, Glenwood, Red Oak, Villisca, Shenandoah, and Carlinda, agricultural communities in the gently rolling hill country of southwestern Iowa. In these towns, citizens had purchased shares to construct armories for the companies of the regiment, and the state government paid rent to the owners. An armory contained offices, a drill hall resembling a basketball court, supply rooms, and facilities for reunions, dances, banquets, and patriotic celebrations.

Guardsmen were, for the most part, unmarried men from eighteen to thirty-five years of age. They received one dollar for attending a training session, and the pay was important in attracting members during the Depression. They met every Monday evening and practiced close-order drill and the manual of arms. They occasionally performed small-unit maneuvers on a football field or in a city square. They received summer training at Camp Dodge, Iowa. The annual inspection in each armory was usually linked to a military ball, the highlight of the social season. Maj. Walter Smith inspected the southwestern Iowa units in 1939 and called them a “very very fine organization.” Other regiments in northern and northwestern Iowa, in Minnesota, and in North Dakota came together with the 168th to form the 34th Division, commanded in 1939 by Maj. Gen. E. A. Walsh of Minneapolis. In the summer of 1940, the division trained at Camp Ripley, Wisconsin. Upon the troops’ return to their armories, revised National Guard programs and schedules doubled their training time. The average guardsman in the 168th had eighteen months of service. Two-thirds were high school graduates; about one-third had some education beyond high school. Captains were between thirty-four and forty-five years of age, and many of them, and more senior officers, had served in World War I. Quite a few men joined the regiment in 1941 to avoid the draft.

The 34th Division was called into active federal service in February 1941. On 2 March, the men of the 168th Infantry had farewell dinners in the armories in their home towns, paraded, then marched to the train stations. They traveled to Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, which was still under construction. Living in tents, the men engaged in close-order drill and small-unit tactics, including night attacks. Some went to schools for special training. Equipment and weapons were in such short supply that stovepipes simulated mortars, trucks carried signs to denote their use as tanks, and broomsticks served as rifles. The heaviest infantry weapon was the 37-mm gun. In April, draftees from all over the country arrived to bring the 34th Division regiments up to strength. The division participated in two maneuvers in Louisiana in June and August.⁶⁴ A Regular Army officer, Maj. Gen. Russell P. Hartle, took command in August. In January 1942, when Hartle assumed command of the V Corps, Maj. Gen. Charles W. Ryder, a West Point graduate,

succeeded him as division commander, and the division sailed for Northern Ireland. The following month, the division was triangularized. The men continued training, practicing amphibious landings in Scotland later that year.

In November, the division participated in the North African invasion, coming ashore near Algiers. Of the soldiers then constituting the 168th Infantry, about 30 percent were from the local armories in southwestern Iowa. Two hundred of these men were reported missing in action on 17 February 1943, a day of severe fighting during the Battle of Kasserine Pass.

In summary, the entire mobilization process, including the organization and training of the U.S. Army, was hasty, largely improvised, and saved from disaster by the stability and intelligence of leaders like Marshall and McNair. This crash program gave the field forces a semblance of preparedness. Yet maneuvers revealed many deficiencies in basic soldiering skills and, among a large proportion of officers, basic command skills. Shortages of weapons and equipment and the need to improvise had hampered instruction. There was insufficient time to permit individuals and units to acquire and become proficient in the doctrine, weapons and equipment, and skills required for the modern warfare of the 1940s. Organizations and men were still largely in tune with the time and space factors that had prevailed in the previous war. They had yet to adjust to the accelerated tempo and increased distances of the battlefield—in particular, the necessary speed of reaction so well understood by their adversaries. American leadership and manpower had the potential to excel, but it would take the reality and the adversity of Kasserine Pass to develop an inherent capacity for excellence.

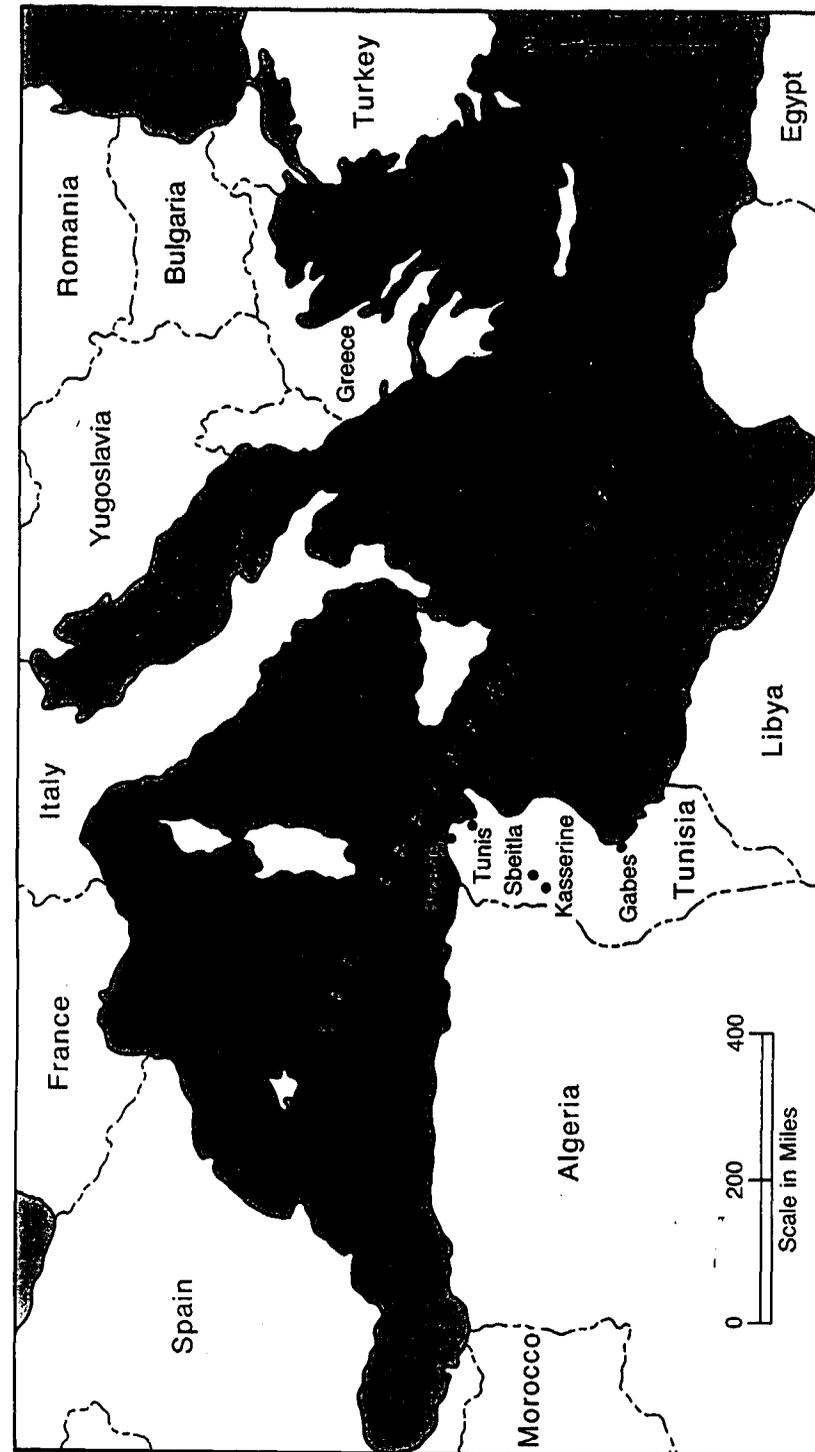
Deployment of American forces began shortly after Pearl Harbor, when Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill confirmed a strategy unofficially reached during Anglo-American staff conversations in 1941. The Allied leaders endorsed a Europe-first endeavor and established machinery to direct the coalition military effort.⁶⁵ The president and prime minister worked through the British Chiefs of Staff and the American Joint Chiefs of Staff sitting together to form the Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS). The CCS issued directives to the theater commanders who were supreme Allied commanders or Allied commanders in chief—the terms were interchangeable—and who would exercise a unified command over the forces of both nations.

American strategists generally favored a massive blow against the German-occupied continent of Europe and a direct thrust into Germany. To these ends, the 34th Infantry Division, the 1st Armored Division, and later the 1st Infantry Division went to Northern Ireland, where they trained under the V Corps headquarters. The European Theater of Operations, U.S. Army, under General Eisenhower provided overall direction, and the II Corps

headquarters under Lt. Gen. Mark W. Clark, who had been McNair's closest associate, served as the theater training command. The British preferred an invasion of French Northwest Africa, where German and Italian troops were absent as a result of the armistice terms of 1940. The French had pledged to resist invasion, but if, as the Allies hoped, they quickly came over to the Allied side, they would offer only brief resistance to the untried Americans. The landings in the French territories would also threaten the Axis forces based in Libya and fighting the British in Egypt.

North Africa became an active theater of operations in 1940 when Italian forces attacked the British. The ensuing campaigns were of a seesaw nature, with first one opponent, then the other achieving temporary success. In 1941, to help Mussolini, Hitler sent General Erwin Rommel's *Afrika Korps* of several German divisions to North Africa. Subsequently, Rommel took command of *Panzer Grupp Afrika*, which consisted of the *Afrika Korps* augmented by several mobile Italian divisions; in 1942, he took charge of *Panzerarmee Afrika*, all the German and Italian combat units. Mussolini and his *Comando Supremo* directed the operations in North Africa through an Italian theater commander. To facilitate Rommel's access to the German high command and to smooth Italo-German coordination, Hitler dispatched Field Marshall Albert Kesselring to Rome. At first commander of the German air forces in Italy, Kesselring was the ranking German officer in the Mediterranean area and, as such, virtually a theater commander. With Kesselring's support, Rommel attacked in May 1942. By June, he was at El Alamein, Egypt, sixty miles short of the Nile. This was the situation in mid-1942 when Roosevelt accepted Churchill's suggestion to invade French Northwest Africa. Eisenhower, named Supreme Allied Commander, and Clark, his deputy, formed a new Allied Force Headquarters (AFHQ) in London and began to plan landings, code-named TORCH, on the shores of Morocco and Algeria.

In August 1942, Rommel attacked from El Alamein only to be stopped by General Sir Harold Alexander, commander of the British Middle East Forces with headquarters in Cairo, and General Sir Bernard E. Montgomery, commanding the British Eighth Army in Egypt. After receiving 300 brand-new American Sherman tanks, the British took the offensive on 23 October and forced Rommel to withdraw. As the British pursued, Rommel conducted a retrograde movement across Libya. During that retreat, TORCH was launched. The invasion took place on 8 November 1942. A task force under Ryder and consisting of the 34th Division, part of the 1st Armored Division, and British elements made the easternmost landing near Algiers, where fighting ended on the first day. Another task force under Maj. Gen. Lloyd R. Fredendall's II Corps and containing the 1st Infantry Division and British units invaded in the center near Oran, where combat terminated on the second day. A wholly American task under Patton, sailing directly from the



Map 8.1. North Africa

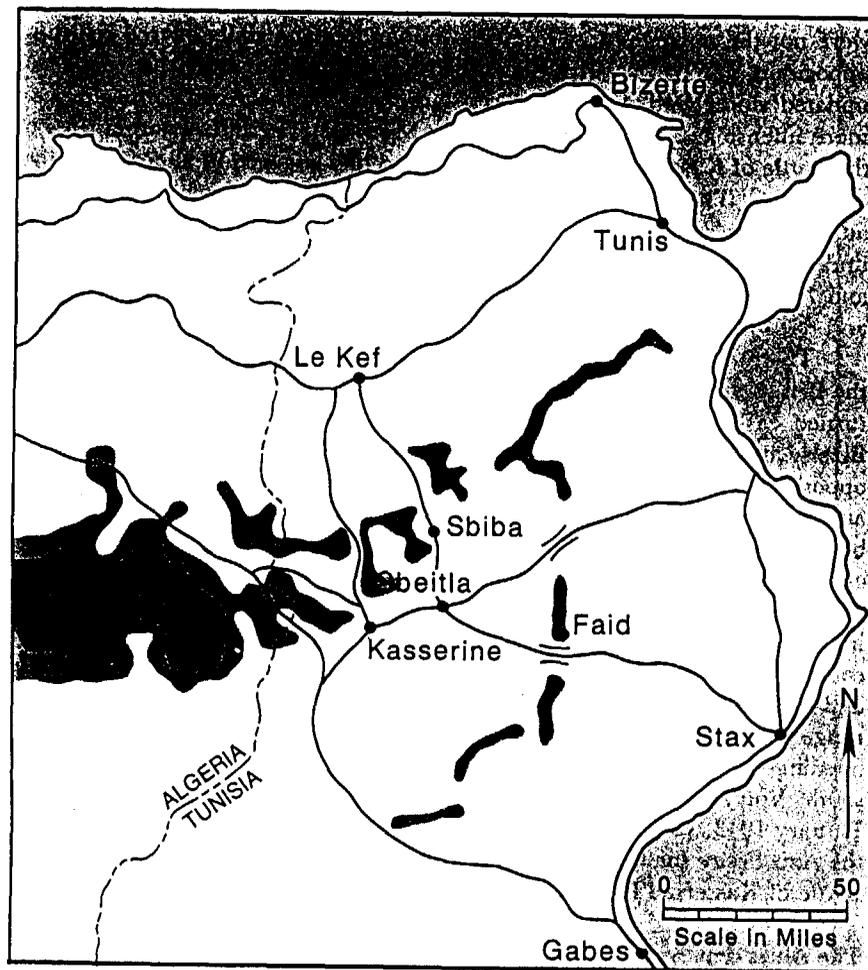
United States, landed in the west near Casablanca and battled French forces vigorously for three days.

These events introduced American troops to combat on the Atlantic side of World War II. But this hardly constituted the first battle, for the French were not the enemy. Most French commanders and units offered reluctant opposition. French organization, doctrine, and war materiel had not been updated since 1940. Curiously, resistance met by the Americans had been more intense and of longer duration in Morocco. The future participants in the Battle of Kasserine Pass were those who had engaged in almost no active operations. They saw their performance against the French as more than adequate for success against the Germans and Italians. Confident of their underpowered light tanks with 37-mm guns, trusting the power of the 57-mm and 75-mm guns on their Shermans, they believed themselves to be blooded and tried in action.⁶⁶

The French authorities in North Africa, after agreeing to a truce, joined the British and Americans who, by then, in accordance with prior plans, had turned eastward from Algeria, entered Tunisia, and were driving toward Bizerte and Tunis, their ultimate objectives. On the way they quickly ran into opposition. Axis troops had entered Tunisia from Italy shortly after TORCH, and eventually a field-army-size force, under General Juergen von Arnim, built up an extended bridgehead covering Bizerte and Tunis in the north-eastern corner. Von Arnim sought to prevent the Allies from overrunning Tunisia and also to permit Rommel's army to finish withdrawing from Libya into southern Tunisia. The Axis would then hold the eastern seaboard of the country. To guarantee their security on the eastern coastal plain, von Arnim and Rommel needed to control the passes in the Eastern Dorsale, a mountain range running generally north and south. Through that chain were four major openings—Pichon and Fondouk in the north and Faid and Rebaou in the south. Von Arnim seized Pichon in mid-December 1942. Toward the end of January 1943, as Rommel settled into the Mareth Line in southern Tunisia, the Axis desire for the other passes initially spurred what developed into the Battle of Kasserine Pass.

The Allies deployed in Tunisia with the bulk of their strength in the north.⁶⁷ Because of bad weather and supply deficiencies, Eisenhower on 24 December called off the offensive toward Bizerte and Tunis. Early in January 1943, to counter Rommel's growing presence, he began moving Fredendall's II Corps headquarters and American units to southern Tunisia in order to buttress poorly equipped French troops holding the Fondouk, Faid, and Rebaou Passes and the town of Gafsa, an important road center.

Allied command lines were less than firm. General Sir Kenneth A. N. Anderson, at the head of the British First Army—with the British V Corps, several British divisions, and some American and French units in the north—



Map 8.2. Tunisia

was the overall tactical commander in Tunisia, but Americans found him difficult to work with. Fredendall exacerbated the problem because he saw his role as autonomous. The French, who had General Louis-Marie Koeltz's XIX Corps in the center, a division in the north, another in the south, and miscellaneous detachments scattered virtually everywhere, refused to serve under direct British command. As a consequence, General Alphonse Juin, commander of the French land and air forces in French Northwest Africa, exercised loose direction and provided liaison and guidance to all French formations.

Fredendall had small packets of troops dispersed over a very large area—one battalion of the 1st Infantry Division at Gafsa, another blocking the Fondouk road to Sbeitla, Combat Command A (CCA) of the 1st Armored Division at Sbeitla, Combat Command B (CCB) near Tebessa. He could bolster the French garrisons holding the Faid and Rebaou Passes, keep his forces concentrated in a central location and ready to counterattack, or strike toward the east coast to sever the contact between von Arnim's and Rommel's armies. He sought to do the latter by raiding a small Italian detachment at Sened on 24 January. The action was highly successful as a morale builder but had no real result except to squander Fredendall's meager resources.

The Axis command correctly read the situation and continued planning to take control of the Eastern Dorsale. Rommel established his headquarters in southern Tunisia on 26 January, and two days later *Comando Supremo* in Rome approved a cautious push to take the Fondouk and Faid Passes and to advance on Gafsa. With Rommel's 10th and 21st Panzer Divisions temporarily under von Arnim's control, von Arnim attacked on 30 January to open the Battle of Kasserine Pass. Just before dawn, thirty tanks struck 1,000 French troops in the Faid Pass while another contingent of German tanks, infantry, and artillery drove through the Rebaou defile ten miles to the south, overran several hundred French defenders, and came up behind the French holding Faid. Encircled and outnumbered, the French fought gallantly for more than twenty-four hours until they were overwhelmed.

Five hours after the German attack started, Anderson instructed Fredendall rather vaguely to restore the situation at Faid. Because Ward, the 1st Armored Division commander, was at Gafsa supervising the Sened raid and other useless actions, Fredendall communicated directly with the CCA commander at Sbeitla, Brig. Gen. Raymond McQuillin, who was old in appearance, mild in manner, and cautious in outlook. McQuillin sent out two small reconnaissance units toward the Faid and Rebaou Passes to determine what was happening. At noontime, even though the French at Faid were still resisting, the reconnaissance elements erroneously reported the Germans in control at both passes. McQuillin decided to counterattack. As he moved his assault forces forward, German planes bombed and attacked his units and disrupted the advance. American aircraft dispatched to intercept the Germans

dropped bombs on the CCA command post by mistake, and American antiaircraft gunners shot down an American plane. McQuillin then waited for nightfall. During the hours of darkness, he pushed his forces about halfway to Faid and Rebaou.

On the morning of 31 January, more than twenty-four hours after the German attack, McQuillin committed a small-tank infantry force under Col. Alexander N. Stark, Jr., to strike to Faid and another such force under Col. William B. Kern to go for Rebaou. Late getting under way, the effort was badly coordinated and too weak to attain the objectives. Heavy German defensive fires, together with effective bombing and strafing from the air, knocked out several tanks and induced terror, indecision, and paralysis among the American units. McQuillin's effort petered out. As Fredendall, the II Corps commander, was thinking on 1 February of moving CCB from Tebessa to Sbeitla, Anderson, the First British Army commander, instructed him to dispatch CCB toward Fondouk, where von Arnim had struck Koeltz's French elements, seized the pass, and threatened a serious penetration. Fredendall complied. McQuillin tried again that day to reach Faid but failed because, he said, of the disgraceful performance of Stark's infantry. Von Arnim, now in control of the four major passes, called off further endeavor. With the *10th Panzer Division* at Fondouk and the *21st* at Faid and Rebaou, von Arnim, instead of returning both divisions to Rommel, hoped to keep them for use in the north. The front in Tunisia now became quiet, and the first or preliminary phase of what would develop into the Battle of Kasserine Pass ended.

On the Allied side, Eisenhower questioned Fredendall's competence, Anderson doubted the battleworthiness of American troops, Fredendall wondered whether Ward was proficient, McQuillin castigated Stark, and so it went down the line. American ineptitude and failure to rescue the French defenders at Faid had shocked the French. Additional American units—parts of Maj. Gen. Terry Allen's 1st Infantry Division and of Ryder's 34th Division—moved into southern Tunisia but they were split into small parcels and physically separated. During the second week of February, Fredendall's combat units were deployed as follows: At the front, in blocking positions on two hills covering the roads west from Faid and Rebaou to Sidi bou Zid and Sbeitla were two forces. On the hill called Djebel Lessouda north of the Faid road was Lt. Col. John K. Waters of the 1st Armored Division. He commanded about 900 troops—a company of fifteen tanks, some reconnaissance elements, a tank-destroyer platoon, and a battery of self-propelled 105-mm howitzers—as well as the 2d Battalion (less a rifle company) of the 168th Infantry. In support of Waters, Lt. Col. Louis Hightower, a few miles away at the village of Sidi bou Zid, commanded fifty-one tanks, twelve tank destroyers, and two artillery battalions of the 1st Armored Division.

On Djebel Ksaira, overlooking the road from Rebaou, was Col. Thomas D. Drake, who had taken command of the 168th Infantry in January. He had about 1,000 men of the 3d Battalion (plus a rifle company of the 2d) of the 168th, plus 650 miscellaneous troops—a medical detachment, the regimental band, 200 engineers, an attached cannon company, several antiaircraft guns, and a few artillery pieces. Supporting Drake was the Reconnaissance Battalion of the 1st Armored Division near Sidi bou Zid. Drake received 200 replacement troops on 12 February, but some lacked weapons, quite a few had never fired a rifle, and none had entrenching tools or bayonets. On the following day, Drake accepted several truckloads of brand-new bazookas; no one on the hill had ever fired this antitank weapon, and Drake planned to figure out how to operate them and to start a training program on 14 February. Behind and west of Waters and Drake were elements of McQuillin's CCA at Sbeitla and Sidi bou Zid. Ward had his division reserve at Sbeitla, a battalion of infantry under Kern, a battalion of tanks, and a company of tank destroyers. CCB was near Fondouk, 100 miles from Sbeitla; Col. Robert I. Stack's Combat Command C (CCC), consisting primarily of the 6th Armored Infantry, was twenty miles away in the same direction.

West of Sbeitla, Stark's 26th Infantry of the 1st Infantry Division and a 1st Armored Division tank battalion under Col. Ben Crosby were at Feriana guarding the road from Gafsa and protecting the airfields at Thelepte, but who controlled them was unclear. Arriving at Gafsa to augment French units presumably under Fredendall's command were a U.S. Ranger battalion, some artillery and tank-destroyer units, plus about a battalion of the 1st Derbyshire Yeomanry, a British armored-car regiment dispatched by Anderson to bolster the inexperienced Americans. Fredendall's II Corps reserve consisted of several artillery and tank-destroyer battalions near Tebessa, where the corps headquarters was located, plus the 1st Battalion, 168th Infantry.

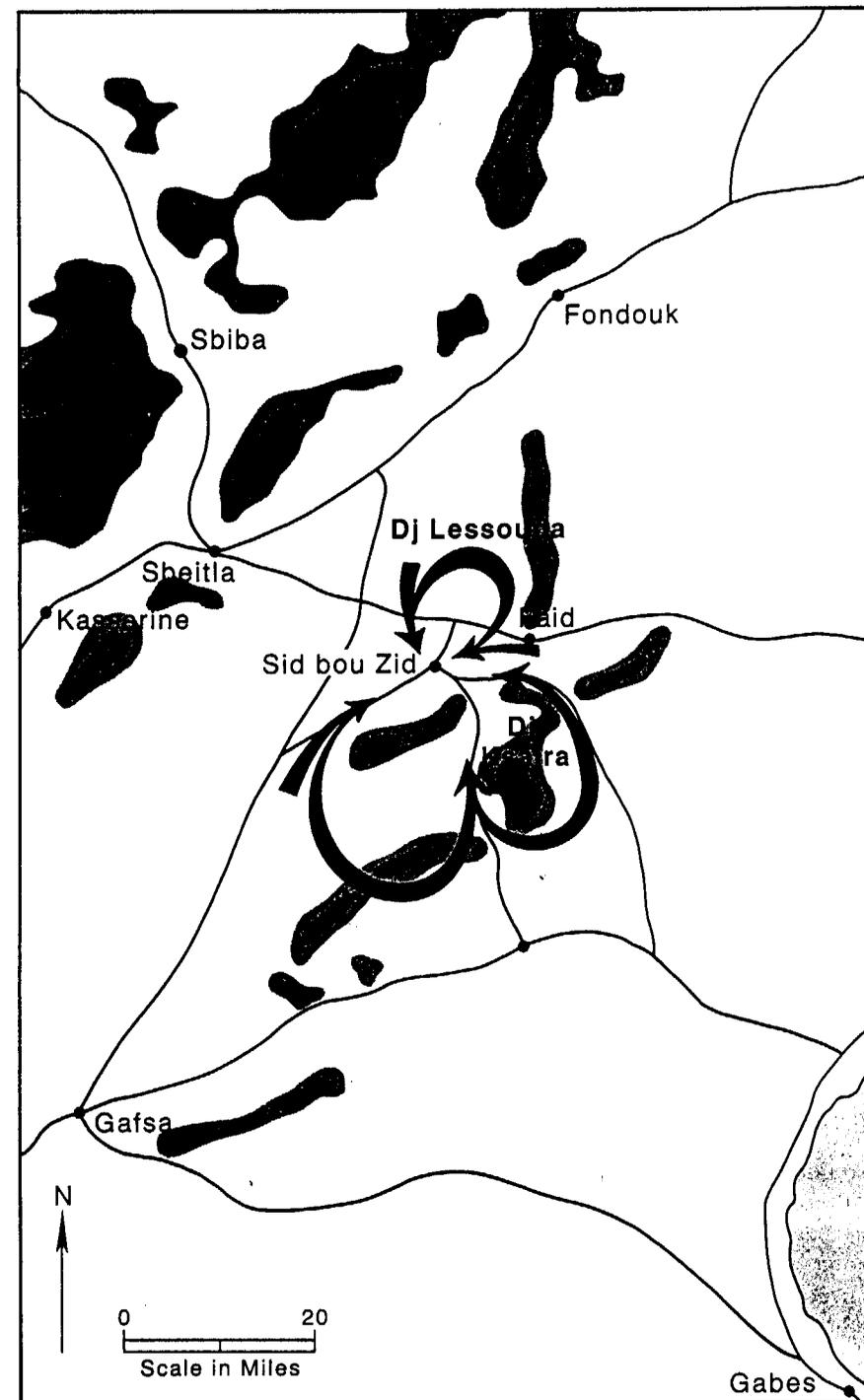
Ultra-secret intercepts indicated an apparent enemy plan to strike through Fondouk to destroy the French in the center of the Allied front, then to turn north and rip into the British flank. Although other sources of intelligence pointed to Axis offensive preparations in the south, Eisenhower's G-2 at AFHQ, a British officer, as well as Anderson, became convinced of an imminent Axis thrust in the north. To preserve these positions, which pointed toward Bizerte and Tunis, Anderson instructed Fredendall to be ready to abandon Gafsa in the south. Together with Koeltz, Fredendall was to prepare to withdraw about fifty miles to the Western Dorsale and there to plug the passes, especially the two important defiles at Kasserine and Sbiba. Contrary to Allied expectations, Kesselring, von Arnim, and Rommel, with *Comando Supremo* approval, decided to launch two attacks, both in the south. Von Arnim was to head for Sidi bou Zid, Rommel for Gafsa. The concept, however, was somewhat fuzzy. Von Arnim wished simply to throw the Allies

off balance and to retain possession of the *10th* and *21st Panzer Divisions*. Rommel hoped to recover control of his two panzer divisions and to go all the way to Tebessa and, if possible, beyond. If the attacks went well, Kesselring promised to give Rommel control of at least one of the panzer divisions and permission to go as far as he could.

The second phase of the Kasserine battle started very early on the morning of 14 February, before Drake could institute his bazooka-firing training program on Djebel Ksaira. During a raging sandstorm, more than 200 German tanks, half-tracks, and guns of both panzer divisions came through Faid. One task force swung around the northern side of Lessouda and encircled the hill; another swung around the southern side of Ksaira and surrounded the height. Waters' and Drake's forces, Fredendall's blocking positions, were thus marooned. A series of American mishaps, due largely to inexperience, then permitted the Germans rather easy and quick success. The bad weather relaxed the Americans' security arrangements, and they were unable to react quickly and firmly. Until the storm lifted, men on the hill had difficulty identifying the German elements and held their fire. At 0730, as the weather cleared, McQuillin initiated planned countermeasures. He limply told Hightower to clear up the situation. As Hightower prepared to drive to Djebel Lessouda and relieve the American defenders, enemy aircraft struck Sidi bou Zid and temporarily disrupted McQuillin's command post and Hightower's preparations. Throughout the rest of the day, German planes harassed the Americans. Despite repeated requests for air support, only one flight of four American aircraft appeared briefly over the battlefield.

Hightower went into action with forty-seven tanks. Although outnumbered, he fought bravely against the more effective German tanks. By mid-afternoon, all but seven of his tanks had been destroyed. During the engagement, some American artillerymen panicked and abandoned their guns. The 1st Armored Division Reconnaissance Battalion, ready to rescue Drake's men on Djebel Ksaira, was unable to even start its counterattack because some of the German tanks surrounding Drake had thrust forward toward Sidi bou Zid and captured a reconnaissance company. The rest of the American reconnaissance units then pulled out and headed for Sbeitla.

With his command post in Sidi bou Zid directly threatened, McQuillin, covered by Hightower's engagement, decided to withdraw to Sbeitla. He phoned and asked Ward to provide a shield by blocking the main road from Faid to Sbeitla. Ward sent Kern and his infantry battalion to take up defensive positions eleven miles east of the town at a road intersection that became known as Kern's Crossroads. Around noon, McQuillin started to move his artillery units and command post out of Sidi bou Zid. German dive bombers attacked them and prompted confusion. As a consequence, for several hours McQuillin lost communications with his subordinate units. That afternoon a swirling mass of American troops—McQuillin's command post, mis-



Map 8.3. Faid

cellaneous elements, Hightower's remnants, artillery pieces, tank destroyers, engineer trucks, and foot soldiers—fled toward Sbeitla. McQuillin re-established his command post there and began to assemble and reorganize his units.

Initial estimates of losses on that day were shocking: 52 officers and more than 1,500 men missing. The final numbers of casualties on 14 February were much smaller: 6 killed, 32 wounded, and 134 missing. But between Faid and Kern's Crossroads on the Sbeitla plain, forty-four tanks, fifty-nine half-tracks, twenty-six artillery pieces, and at least two dozen trucks were wrecked, burning, or abandoned. An artillery commander, Charles P. Summerall, Jr., took his men out during the night to recover guns, trucks, and ambulances; on the following morning, he had eight instead of his normal twenty-four pieces—the others were lost—backing the troops at Kern's Crossroads.

Rommel urged von Arnim to continue his attack during the night in order to exploit his tactical success, but von Arnim was satisfied to await the American counterattack he figured was inevitable. Ward at Sbeitla was indeed planning a counterattack. He, as well as McQuillin and Fredendall, radioed Waters and Drake to sit tight on the heights and await rescue. To strengthen Ward, Fredendall sent him some artillery and tank destroyers from Feriana. Fredendall asked Anderson to return Brig. Gen. Paul Robinett's CCB to Ward's control. But because Anderson expected the main German effort to strike in the Fondouk-Pichon area, he held the bulk of Robinett's force and released Lt. Col. James D. Alger's tank battalion, which arrived in Sbeitla on the evening of 14 February. With Alger merely replacing Hightower's destroyed battalion, Fredendall ordered Crosby to move his battalion from Thelepte to Sbeitla during the night.

Anderson had three major concerns: the American losses in the Faid-Sidi bou Zid region, the dispersal of the Allied units in the south, and the increasing vulnerability of his positions in the north. Telephoning Eisenhower, Anderson suggested evacuating Gafsa in order to concentrate strength in defense of the Feriana-Sbeitla area. Eisenhower agreed but asked Anderson to withdraw over two consecutive evenings. Anderson then instructed Fredendall to move the French troops out of Gafsa that night, 14 February, and the Americans on the following night. The French pulled out of Gafsa; so did most of the civilian population and American supply and service units. Around midnight, Anderson changed his mind and ordered Fredendall to withdraw the American combat troops. As the considerable movement reached Feriana, forty miles away, many rear-area troops became nervous. Some began to destroy depots and supply points in Feriana and Thelepte. Uncertain that Ward could hold Sbeitla, Anderson on the evening of 14 February instructed Koeltz to cover the Sbiba Pass in the Western Dorsale. He was to move French troops and the 34th Division to Sbiba. To block the Kasserine Pass if Ward had to pull out of Sbeitla, Anderson told Fredendall to

have Ward fall back to the west for twenty miles and defend at Kasserine. Fredendall sent engineer troops to Kasserine to start building defensive positions.

In Algiers, Eisenhower ordered American units in Algeria to start for Kasserine Pass, a movement requiring several days' travel. News of their departure, he surmised, would perhaps hearten the troops in Tunisia. While Eisenhower, Anderson, and Fredendall prepared to withdraw to the Western Dorsale, Ward looked forward confidently to his counterattack on 15 February. Stack's infantry and Alger's tanks were to marry up at Kern's Crossroads, drive to Sidi bou Zid, then rescue the troops on the heights of Lessouda and Ksaira. While Alger, who had yet to lead his troops in combat, studied the terrain from a hill on the morning of 15 February and Stack readied his infantry for the advance, a flight of German bombers struck their formations and prompted enormous confusion.

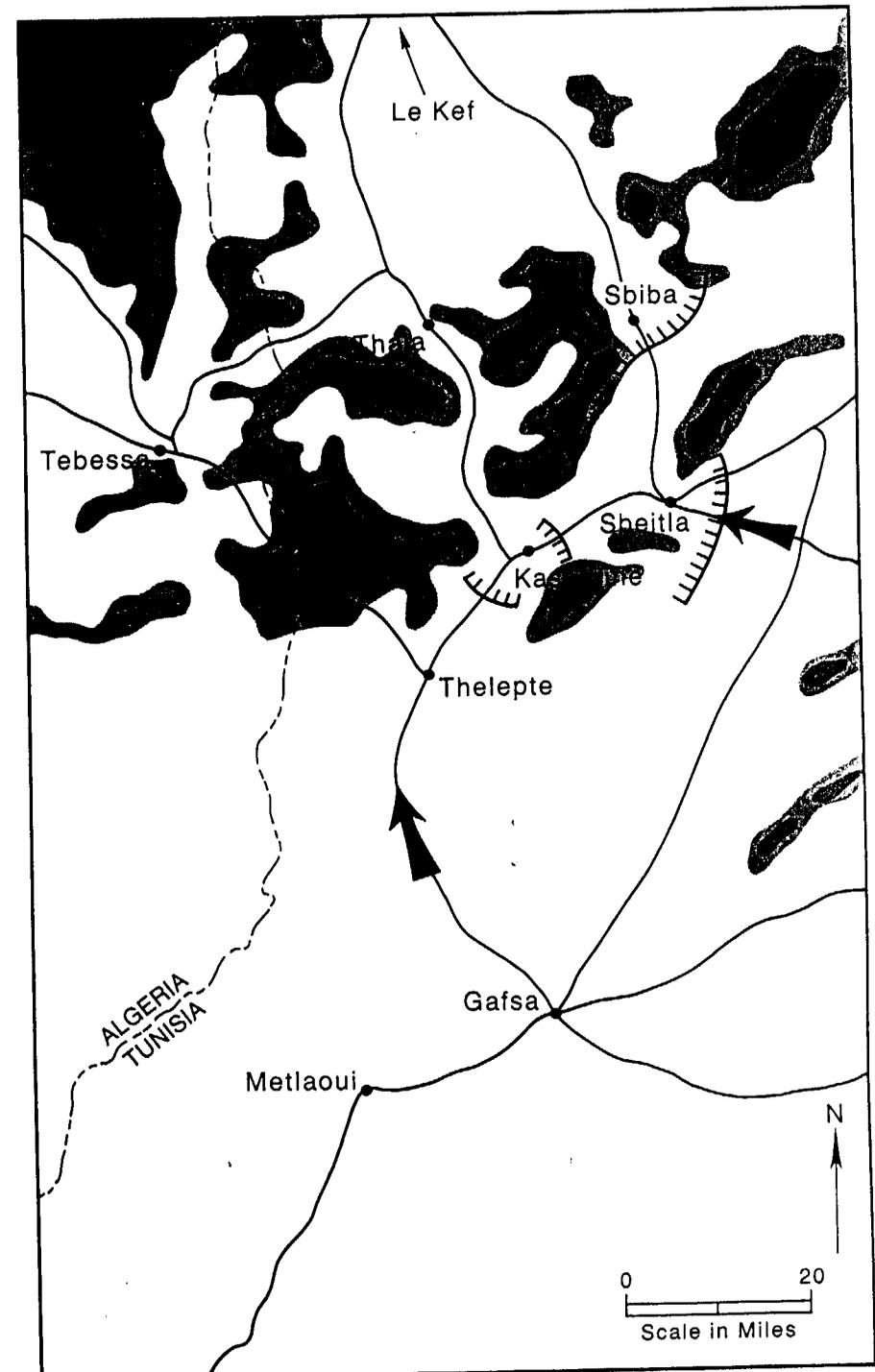
The counterattack finally started at 1240 in great precision across the Sbeitla plain. Alger's tank battalion led, his three tank companies advancing in parallel columns with a company of tank destroyers, half-tracks mounting 75-mm guns, flaring out on the flanks and protecting two batteries of artillery. Behind rode Stack's infantry in trucks and half-tracks with several antiaircraft weapons as protection. Unfortunately, steep-sided *wadis*—dry stream beds—crossed the plain irregularly and disturbed the careful spacing of the attacking troops. As the tanks crossed the first ditch, German dive bombers jumped them. They bombed and strafed again at the second gully. At the third depression, German artillery began firing. Finally, German tanks emerged from hiding and started to encircle the entire American force. The Americans, fighting bravely and desperately against superior German weapons and experienced German troops, tried to beat back the German wings threatening to surround them. At 1800, Stack ordered all units to disengage and return to Kern's Crossroads. The infantry and artillery escaped relatively unscathed. The tanks were completely destroyed. Alger was taken prisoner, 15 of his officers and 298 enlisted men were missing, and fifty of his tanks had been knocked out. In two days of battle, the 1st Armored Division lost ninety-eight tanks, fifty-seven half-tracks, and twenty-nine artillery pieces.

Just before darkness, a pilot dropped a message from Ward to the troops on Lessouda. They were to get out during the night. Waters having been captured, Maj. Robert R. Moore, who had taken command of the 2d Battalion, 168th Infantry, fewer than two weeks earlier, displayed magnificent leadership and marched out about one-third of the 900 troops on Lessouda to Kern's Crossroads. The other men, together with vehicles and equipment, fell into German hands. Drake on Djebel Ksaira received a message from McQuillin on the afternoon of the following day, 16 February, to fight his way out. That night, Drake led his men off the hill and across the plain. German troops intercepted them and captured almost all. Only a handful reached

safety. The two battalions of the 168th Infantry involved on Lessouda and Ksaira sustained losses of about 2,200 men. Two hundred of the soldiers reported missing were from the southwestern Iowa National Guard units. Meanwhile, when Rommel's attack forces, an Italo-German group of 160 tanks, half-tracks, and guns, learned on the afternoon of 15 February that the Allies had abandoned Gafsa, they advanced to the town, entered, and patrolled toward Feriana. That brought the second phase of the battle to a close.

In southern Tunisia, Rommel completed his long retreat across Libya and gathered his troops to the Mareth Line on that day. He could not understand why von Arnim did not push immediately into and through Sbeitla. Von Arnim cautiously wanted first to mop up in the Lessouda, Ksaira, and Sidi bou Zid area. Then he would take Sbeitla, turn north, and sweep clear the western exits of the Fondouk and Pinchon Passes. The absence of an overall commander of the two separate German forces in Gafsa and in Sidi bou Zid, together with the lack of firm objectives at the outset of the attack, now delayed the German course of action. Kesselring, visiting Hitler in East Prussia, learned what had happened and telephoned his chief of staff in Rome. He directed him to relay an order for a push to Tebessa with Rommel in command. This first required *Comando Supremo* approval, and when approached, the Italian high command hesitated.

In the meantime, on 16 February, Anderson and Frëndall ordered Ward to go over on the defensive and to concentrate "on guarding the Feriana, Kasserine, Sbeitla areas." Ward's chances of doing so improved when CCB, after an all-night movement, reported at Sbeitla. Ward put CCB south of the town, beside CCA, which pulled back from Kern's Crossroads. For the first time, the 1st Armored Division was operating in combat as a single unit. That afternoon, when small German forces probed toward Sbeitla, Crosby's tank battalion and a provisional company of a few tanks and tank destroyers under Hightower halted them and permitted Ward to set up a coherent defensive line covering the town. On the same afternoon, Anderson moved to strengthen the defense of the Sbiba Pass. From the northern sector, he sent a brigade of Maj. Gen. Sir Charles Keightley's British 6th Armoured Division southward. Koeltz moved the 34th Division (less the 168th Infantry) west from the Pichon area. That evening, *Comando Supremo* gave von Arnim permission to attack Sbeitla, and he jumped off at once. After nightfall, preceded by reconnaissance units, German tanks approached Sbeitla in three columns, firing as they advanced. Shells dropping into Sbeitla prompted McQuillin to shift his CCA headquarters to a location west of the town. Many American troops misinterpreted the movement and believed a wholesale evacuation was in progress. A good part of the CCA defenders panicked and fled. Why?



Map 8.4. Sbeitla

Night fighting was a new and terrifying experience for most of the men. The solidity of the defensive line was more apparent on a map than on the ground. Because of the darkness, the troops were not well placed. Because of the haste of the withdrawal, they were not well dug in. The harrowing events of three days of defeat had exhausted many soldiers, morally and physically. Uncertain and nervous, fatigued and confused, hemmed in by widespread firing that seemed to be all around them, believing that the Germans were already in Sbeitla, demoralized by the piecemeal commitment and intermingling of small units, no longer possessing a firm sense of belonging to a strong and self-contained organization, and numbed by a pervading attitude of weariness and bewilderment, many men lost their confidence and self-discipline.⁶⁸

A churning mass of vehicles surged through the town and departed. When engineers demolished an ammunition dump, they intensified fear and prompted additional departures. Around midnight, concerned over his ability to hold Sbeitla, Ward telephoned Fredendall and suggested reinforcing Kasserine in strength.

At 0130 on 17 February, Anderson, talking with Fredendall on the telephone, authorized Ward to withdraw from Sbeitla. Anderson asked that Ward hold all day in order to give Koeltz more time to install blocking positions at Sbiba. Fredendall thought that that was too much to ask of Ward, and Anderson finally agreed that Ward was to hold the town until 1100 on 17 February and longer if he could. At dawn, on 17 February, Fredendall issued a directive. Ward and the 1st Armored Division, when forced to leave Sbeitla, were to retire through the Kasserine Pass toward Thala. Anderson Moore's 19th Engineers were to organize the Kasserine Pass defensively and to cover Ward's withdrawal. Stark's infantry regiment was to defend Feriana until compelled to pull back toward Tebessa. Air force personnel were to abandon the Thelepte airfields. At Sbeitla, the Germans lessened their pressure as they turned to round up Drake's men coming off Ksaira. The 1st Armored Division settled down and held, although rear-area units, preparing to leave, blew up dumps and destroyed supplies.

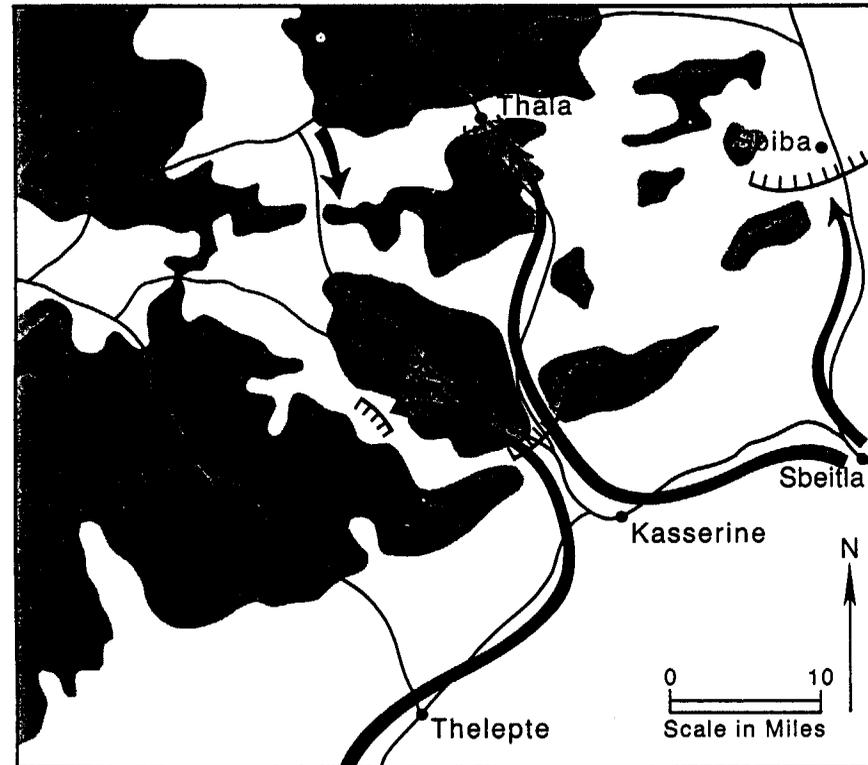
From Gafsa, the Italians and Germans of Rommel's force advanced in strength and entered Feriana. About 3,500 men at the nearby Thelepte airfields were streaming toward Tebessa after having burned 60,000 gallons of gasoline, thirty-four disabled aircraft, and facilities. Stark retired to Tebessa. The *Afrika Korps* entered Thelepte at noon and salvaged twenty tons of aviation gas, thirty tons of lubricants, plus ammunition and assorted supplies. Fredendall moved his command post out of Tebessa and for about six hours had no communications with his subordinates. Increasingly nervous supply and service units in and around Tebessa began to head for the west in search of safety. At Sbeitla, the Germans attacked that afternoon, and, although CCB held relatively well, panic in the town turned the place into a nightmare.

In accordance with new instructions, CCA, harassed by German planes, pulled back and moved north to Sbiba. That evening, the troops dug hasty defenses to block the Sbiba Pass and allow Koeltz's arriving forces to take positions. CCB withdrew to Kasserine. The Germans entered Sbeitla at 1700.

After four days of fighting in the Faid-Sidi bou Zid-Sbeitla area, the Americans had lost more than 2,500 men, 100 tanks, 280 vehicles, and 30 guns. Mounting uncertainty and nervousness infected Allied forces as far away as Algiers. The Germans, holding Gafsa, Feriana, Thelepte, and Sbeitla, threatened the Sbiba, Kasserine, and other passes in the Western Dorsale. If they pressed forward, they would menace Tebessa, Le Kef, Bone—indeed, the entire Allied front in Tunisia. Thus ended the third phase of the Battle of Kasserine Pass.

On the evening of 17 February, von Arnim left the *21st Panzer Division* at Sbeitla, sent a task force north toward Sbiba, and dispatched the *10th Panzer Division* to take positions in reserve behind the Pichon and Fondouk passes. When Rommel telephoned that evening and suggested a lightning thrust to Tebessa, von Arnim was uninterested, although he permitted reconnaissance elements to probe beyond Sbeitla toward Kasserine the next day. Rommel, still lured by the prospect of exploiting success, sent a message to Kesselring on the afternoon of 18 February. He proposed an attack to Tebessa with the *10th* and *21st Panzer Divisions*. Kesselring was in accord and passed the recommendation to *Comando Supremo*. That night, *Comando Supremo* approved but stipulated a shorter hook or envelopment to Le Kef. Rommel was to control the two panzer divisions and the *Afrika Korps*, of which the Italian *Centauro Division* was a part, but he was to have no authority over von Arnim. Instructing the *21st Panzer Division* to strike to Sbiba, the *Afrika Korps* to advance to Kasserine, Rommel recalled the *10th Panzer Division* to Sbeitla. Depending on which attack succeeded, he would commit the *10th* to Sbiba or to Kasserine.

On the Allied side on 18 February, the shock of defeat was visible among the troops. Everyone was tired. Units were mauled, dispersed, and mixed; had no specific missions; lacked knowledge of adjacent formations. The troops seemed to be slipping out of control. Eisenhower sent artillery and tank destroyers from Algeria to Tunisia. A shipment of 295 new Sherman tanks had just arrived, but unwilling to risk losing them all, he released 30 to the British and 30 to the 1st Armored Division. Alexander had come to Algiers on 15 February in accordance with agreements reached at the Allied Casablanca Conference in January and prepared to take command of the ground forces in Tunisia—Anderson's First Army and Montgomery's Eighth—which were approaching the Mareth Line. Alexander conferred with Eisenhower, then toured the British front on 16 February, visited the French sector on 17 February, and traveled on 18 February to the II Corps area. He was horrified to see the state of confusion and uncertainty and was upset by the absence of a



Map 8.5. Kasserine

coordinated plan of defense. Instead of waiting to take command of the ground forces on 20 February, he assumed command on the nineteenth and ordered everyone to hold in place. There was to be no withdrawal from the Western Dorsale.

Moore's 19th Engineers had been laying mines between the village of Kasserine and the pass, five miles beyond. On 18 February, having covered the withdrawal of CCB through the village and the pass, Moore moved his men through the pass and organized defensive positions. Just beyond the pass, on the western side, the road splits: one route leads to the west toward Tebessa; the other, the main road, goes north to Thala. Moore, with about 200 engineers and infantrymen armed with small arms and automatic weapons and supported by two batteries of U.S. 105-mm howitzers, a battery of French 75s, and a battalion of tank destroyers in the rear, covered the road to Tebessa. An infantry battalion defended the road to Thala.⁶⁹ Most of the troops were inexperienced and nervous. On the evening of 18 February, Anderson instructed Koeltz to dispatch a brigade of Keightley's 6th Armoured Division from Sbiba to Thala. Brig. Charles A. L. Dunphie's 26th Armoured Brigade moved. He was thus in place to help the American battalion defending the road from Kasserine to Thala. Or he could move back to Sbiba if the main German threat developed there.

Meanwhile, CCA of the 1st Armored Division, having given Keightley's and Ryder's forces, as well as the French, time to set up defensive positions at the Sbiba Pass, drove through Sbiba to Tebessa. On 19 February, CCA arrived at the three minor passes south and west of Kasserine to bolster remnants of a French division, two American battalions (one of Rangers, the other of infantry), the Derbyshire Yeomanry, and CCB. When German reconnaissance units probed the Kasserine Pass on the evening of 18 February, some of Moore's engineers fled. That night Fredendall put Stark in command of all the units defending the pass. Stark arrived on the morning of 19 February as the Germans attacked in earnest. Seeking surprise, an infantry battalion of the *Afrika Korps* advanced through Kasserine Pass without artillery preparation. When the troops met opposition, a panzer grenadier battalion backed by 88-mm cannon reinforced them. A unit of British mortars and some reconnaissance elements had just arrived at the Kasserine Pass, and they helped the Americans hold off the Germans. When Moore asked for more infantry to support his engineers, Stark seized on a battalion of the 9th U.S. Infantry Division that had just arrived from Algeria. Stark sent two rifle companies to Moore—one for each flank of Moore's defenses—and kept one for the Thala road, thereby splitting the battalion.

Rommel himself came to Kasserine, was impressed by the opposition, and decided to make his main effort toward Sbiba. But he wished the attack at Kasserine to continue. After clearing the pass, his troops were to strike westward toward Tebessa in order to stretch the Allied defenses. The 21st

Panzer Division had attacked Sbiba that morning, but Koeltz, Keightley, and Ryder had stopped the thrust. Rommel then changed his mind and decided to concentrate in the Kasserine area. He ordered the *10th Panzer Division*, which was on its way to Sbeitla, to continue on to the Kasserine Pass. The division was at half strength, for von Arnim had refused to release some units, particularly the heavy panzer battalion, which had about two dozen enormous Tiger tanks. Because the *10th* was moving slowly, an impatient Rommel brought up the *Centauro Division*. He now wished the *Afrika Korps* to open the pass and to drive westward toward Tebessa. The *10th Panzer Division*, after going through the Kasserine Pass, was to strike at Thala. That evening, the 16th Infantry of the 1st Division marched from the Sbiba area to the Kasserine area. Fredendall sent it to bolster the minor passes south and west of Kasserine. He gave General Allen, the 1st Division commander who was with the regiment, the job of coordinating the defenses of these passes. Fredendall then ordered CCB of the 1st Armored Division to back up the engineers on the Tebessa road at Kasserine Pass where the defenses seemed on the verge of collapse. Dunphie, commander of the 26th Armoured Brigade at Thala, asked permission to reinforce Stark, but Keightley wanted him to be on hand if he was needed at Sbiba. Dunphie nonetheless sent eleven of his tanks from Thala to buttress Stark's positions that night.

On 20 February, the *21st Panzer Division* attacked Sbiba again and made no progress. But at Kasserine, the shrieks of the *nebelwerfer*, multiple rocket launchers that had been recently introduced by the Germans, unnerved Moore's engineers holding the Tebessa road. They fell apart, and by afternoon—having lost eleven men killed, twenty-eight wounded, and eighty-nine missing in three days (and many more had temporarily vanished)—they no longer existed as a coherent force. Fortunately, Robinett's CCB arrived and blocked the road. On the main route to Thala, although jittery, the defenders held. Rommel then became even more impatient for a quick victory at Sbiba and Kasserine. He was apprehensive over the Mareth Line positions, for Montgomery had just that day attacked his outposts in southern Tunisia. Late in the afternoon, on Anderson's order, Keightley dispatched Brig. Cameron Nicholson, his assistant division commander, from Sbiba to Thala with miscellaneous troops. No longer confident of Fredendall's ability, Anderson wished Nicholson to command, as Fredendall's representative, all the British, American, and French fighting on the west side of Kasserine Pass. What actually developed was that Fredendall and Robinett commanded the forces blocking the Tebessa road, and Nicholson and Dunphie took control of the units defending the Thala road.

On 21 February, Rommel let the attacks in the Sbiba area continue but looked for decisive success at Kasserine. He decided to make his main effort to Thala and to head for Le Kef beyond. Furious fighting on both the Tebessa and Thala roads resulted in a slight German advance toward Tebessa and the

prospect of German tactical success at Thala. By now, Stark's force on the Thala road had virtually evaporated, and Dunphie emerged as the chief Allied protagonist. Committing his tanks and infantry against a strong thrust directed by Rommel himself, who took control of the battle for several hours, Dunphie lost the bulk of his armor and had to withdraw to the final line of defense before Thala. The Germans followed, and fierce combat erupted after darkness and ended in a draw. Both sides retired 1,000 yards—Dunphie to the north, the Germans to the south. The final defensive line was virtually uncovered, and Rommel seemed about to enter Thala. Expecting just that, Anderson asked Koeltz, who had again stopped the Germans at Sbiba, to send a battalion of infantry and whatever else he could to Thala. Because Ryder was making some local adjustments, Koeltz requested Keightley to dispatch elements. That night, a battalion of British infantry and some tanks traveled along a mountain trail to reinforce Nicholson and Dunphie.

Meanwhile, Allied units were coming from Algeria. A battalion of French infantry moved from Constantine and arrived at Sbiba. Fifty-two Sherman tanks and crews were en route to Tebessa. A provisional British unit with twenty-five new Churchill tanks reached Sbiba. The 47th Infantry of the 9th U.S. Division was on the way from Oran to Tebessa. Most important, Brig. Gen. S. LeRoy Irwin's 9th Division Artillery, with three artillery battalions and two cannon companies, traveling from western Algeria, got to Tebessa on the afternoon of 21 February. Ordered to Thala at once, Irwin's guns were in position by midnight. Nicholson placed Irwin in charge of all the artillery at Thala, and Irwin sited his forty-eight pieces, plus thirty-six other guns of various calibers, to cover the all-but-abandoned final line of defense, manned now by British infantry reinforced by stragglers rounded up by Stark, about twenty tanks of Dunphie's brigade, plus the British infantry battalion and a few tanks, some of them new Shermans released by Eisenhower, coming from Sbiba. Less than a mile away were at least fifty German tanks, 2,500 infantry, thirty artillery pieces, and other weapons, including the notorious *nebelwerfer*.

The *10th Panzer Division* was ready to start what Rommel expected would be the advance into Thala on the morning of 22 February, when Irwin's guns opened up. Expecting a counterattack, the Germans postponed their effort. Nicholson launched a foray and, although he lost five tanks, bluffed the Germans. Rommel came up the Thala road, noted the increased volume of Allied shelling, and gave permission to delay the offensive. Now Robinett and his CCB seemed about to be overwhelmed. During the previous night, approximately a battalion of German and Italian troops had infiltrated the American positions. Intending to strike toward Tebessa, they became lost. On the morning of 22 February, they arrived in the rear of the miscellaneous Allied troops—American, French, and British—guarding the Bou Chebka Pass, one of the minor defiles south and west of Tebessa. The Axis force

captured several American howitzers and anti-aircraft guns and prompted considerable anxiety over the security of that pass and two others nearby. It took most of the day to track down, disperse, and capture the Italo-German unit.

Under the impression that Allied defenses were caving in, Fredendall went to the commander of the under-strength French division in the area and asked him to defend Tebessa. While Fredendall was gone, someone at the II Corps headquarters decided to move the corps command post to avoid being overrun. When Fredendall returned, he found his headquarters half abandoned; many clerks and radio operators were on the way to Le Kef and Constantine. Feeling unable to maintain control, Fredendall, having already passed responsibility to Allen for the minor passes, now instructed Ward to coordinate the defenses on the Tebessa road. Learning that the 47th Infantry of the 9th Division was about thirty miles south of Constantine, Fredendall asked the regiment to remain where it was in order to protect Constantine in case the Axis forces broke through Thala and Tebessa.

During the night of 22 February, Anderson, whose British First Army headquarters was nine miles north of Sbiba, shifted his command post behind Le Kef. Koeltz almost pulled his headquarters back too, for von Arnim had attacked half-heartedly in the Pichon area. But Koeltz drew Keightley's and Ryder's divisions out of Sbiba and faced them toward Thala to meet the expected breakthrough there. Sbiba lay open to German entry. However, nothing happened at Sbiba or at Kasserine. After conferring with Kesselring, who came to Tunisia on the afternoon of 22 February, Rommel called off his attack. He had been unable to secure von Arnim's cooperation. He thought it impossible to obtain a decisive victory before Montgomery attacked the Mareth Line. His units were fatigued, and Rommel himself was extremely tired and discouraged. That night, Rommel ordered his forces to withdraw to the Eastern Dorsale and the east coast. They did so early on the morning of 23 February, leaving a profusion of mines and destroyed bridges in their wake. There was no Allied pursuit of the departing enemy. According to Koeltz, the Allied units "were in such disorder and their commanders so shaken" that no immediate reaction was possible.⁷⁰ The Battle of Kasserine Pass was over.

On the afternoon of 23 February, some Allied units moved forward cautiously. They found no enemy. Not until two days later did the Allies understand that Rommel's offensive had ended. They then advanced to the east and several days later were again in Sbeitla and Sidi bou Zid, in Thelepte, Feriana, and Gafsa.

German losses in the Kasserine operation totaled almost 1,000 casualties—200 men killed, almost 550 wounded, 250 missing—and 14 guns, 61 motor vehicles, 6 half-tracks, and 20 tanks were destroyed. Italian losses are unknown. The II Corps took 73 Germans and 535 Italians prisoner. The Germans reported capturing 4,000 prisoners, 62 tanks and half-tracks, 161

motor vehicles, and 36 guns. But American losses were much higher. About 30,000 Americans engaged in the Kasserine fighting under II Corps, and probably 300 were killed, almost 3,000 wounded, nearly 3,000 missing. It would take 7,000 replacements to bring the units to authorized strengths. The 34th Division under the French XIX Corps at Sbiba sustained approximately 50 men killed, 200 wounded, and 250 missing. II Corps lost 183 tanks, 104 half-tracks, 208 artillery pieces, and 512 trucks and jeeps, plus large amounts of supplies—more than the combined stocks in American depots in Algeria and Morocco. The series of operations known as the Battle of Kasserine Pass—from the start at Faid through Sidi bou Zid and Sbeitla to the final act at the Kasserine defile—was a disaster for the U.S. Army.

U.S. forces at Kasserine displayed several strengths. The battle confirmed the leadership of certain individuals—among them Ward, Robinett, Hightower, Alger, Waters, and Stack in the 1st Armored Division; Ryder, Drake, and Moore in the 34th Division; Summerall the artilleryman; and many at the small-unit level whose names escaped notice. New weapons and equipment coming to the field of battle, although at first poorly managed, turned out to be superior. The .50-caliber anti-aircraft machine gun, used particularly well by CCB along the road leading to Tebessa, spelled the doom of the German dive bomber. The Sherman tank proved to be battleworthy. The bazooka would be used with success later. When relatively inexperienced American troops fought alongside seasoned allies, notably as at Sbiba, they stood firm and controlled. If the British were largely responsible for stopping the Germans on the road to Thala, the Americans had, after initial unsteadiness, settled down and blocked the road to Tebessa. Instead of being disheartened by their inexperience, they displayed a remarkable recovery and an ability to learn. Subsequent operations in Tunisia revealed their competence and confidence. They quickly came to regard their allies with understanding and to work with them closely despite differences in national outlooks, habits, and methods.

The weaknesses the Americans showed were those usually demonstrated by inexperienced troops committed to battle for the first time. Beforehand, they were overconfident, as CCA was at Sidi bou Zid; once committed, they were jittery, as were Moore's engineers. They lacked proficiency in newly developed weapons such as bazookas. They had difficulty identifying enemy weapons and equipment. They were handicapped by certain poor commanders—Fredendall, who was arrogant, opinionated, and perhaps less than stable; McQuillin and Stark, known as Old Mac and Old Stark, whose reactions were slow, cautious, and characteristic of World War I operations. Units were dispersed and employed in small parcels instead of being concentrated. Air-ground cooperation was defective. Replacement troops were often deficient in physical fitness and training. Some weapons were

below par—the light tank was suitable only for reconnaissance; the tank destroyer was insufficiently armed and armored; the 37-mm gun was too small. Higher commanders shirked the responsibility or lacked the knowledge to coordinate units in battle, to delineate firm unit boundaries, to mass defensive fire, and to provide military police to handle traffic and prisoners of war. Commanders were in general imprecise in their orders. Command lines among the Allied forces had been tenuous, and mutual lack of confidence and bitterness marred relations. In addition, “American troops in North Africa enjoyed very little direct support from aircraft and suffered many attacks at the hands of friendly fliers, all because no solutions had been developed for the problems identified in the 1941 maneuvers of Louisiana and Carolinas.”⁷¹

The strengths of the Axis as perceived by the Americans consisted of combat troops’ experience; the superiority of certain items of equipment, notably the German tanks; the effectiveness of the *nebelwerfer*; and the close coordination of tactical air support with ground operations. Axis weaknesses were a lack of trust between Germans and Italians, the absence of an effective coalition machinery to provide overall theater direction, and, although it was scarcely remarked on at the time, the petty jealousies among commanders, notably between von Arnim and Rommel. Had Axis forces been closely coordinated by an overall commander in pursuit of bold objectives enunciated by a self-confident coalition, the Axis would, no doubt, have attained a strategic victory instead of merely a tactical success.

As a consequence of the Battle of Kasserine Pass, the U.S. Army instituted many changes. Officers worked to improve fire-direction control, to obtain better battlefield intelligence, and to gain more effective air support. Four months after Kasserine, in July 1943, the Army Ground Forces lengthened the thirteen-week basic training cycle to seventeen weeks and stressed physical conditioning, mine laying and removal, patrolling, reconnaissance, and other combat techniques. The Army concentrated on producing the Sherman tank and procuring larger caliber guns, notably those of 76-mm and 90-mm. Commanders decided to employ units as units instead of parceling them out in small segments. Fredendall, McQuillin, and Stark were removed from positions of leadership. Emphasis was now placed on efficiency, discipline, and self-control. The Army tightened its procedures and became more military in the best sense of the word.

More specifically, the War Department made changes in the infantry division.⁷² In March 1943, the infantry squad was authorized ten Garand rifles, one automatic rifle, and one Springfield 1903 Model rifle, a considerable increase in small-arms firepower. The cannon company with six self-propelled 75-mm howitzers and two self-propelled 105-mm howitzers had been used at the infantry battalion level, but in March 1943, the War Department abolished the cannon companies in infantry battalions and replaced them with the increased firepower and greater flexibility of three

cannon platoons at the infantry regimental level with six towed 105-mm howitzers. The experience of the 1st Armored Division in North Africa was considered too fragmentary to give guidance on reorganization. Furthermore, deployment of the armored division in the Battle of Kasserine Pass was defensive and not in line with the aggressively offensive mission for which the armored divisions had been intended. Nevertheless, on 15 September 1943, while the 1st and 2d Armored Divisions, both overseas, remained as constituted under the 1942 tables of organization and equipment, other and newer armored divisions were restructured and lightened. The regimental echelon was abolished, and the battalion became the basic unit. All battalions were alike and therefore interchangeable. Three battalions of tanks, infantry, and artillery increased flexibility and doubled the proportion of infantry to tanks. Three combat commands, all of which could fight, now became standard.

The 37-mm gun had been a failure in North Africa, and the War Department recognized this fact. But while the weapon was “definitely abandoned” in favor of the 57-mm gun as the result of experience in Tunisia, the 37-mm gun had to be retained until enough 57-mm guns could be produced to replace the lighter model.

The tank destroyer, “armed with unsatisfactory and makeshift expedients,” was a disappointment. In general, the weapon lacked suitable armor protection and firepower. Creation and development of the weapon, as well as training for its use, had come too late for Kasserine Pass. When “it became clear from the limited operations in Tunisia . . . that tank destroyer units would not be requested by theater commanders in anything like the numbers that were becoming available,” McNair recommended in April 1943 further reducing the number of tank destroyer battalions to be activated. The maximum projection of 222 battalions had already been cut to 144; now it was curtailed to 106.

In May 1943, when Ward, having been relieved as commander of the 1st Armored Division, assumed command of the Tank Destroyer Center at Camp Hood, he shifted the principal training emphasis to gunnery, developed the capacity for indirect fire, and stressed teamwork and operating in simulated battle conditions. The field manual was rewritten in June 1943 in light of the lessons of the battle. There was a shift toward using towed three-inch tank destroyers, which were now beginning to be regarded as defensive weapons. Not until the European campaign of 1944 was a proper role found for tank destroyers. They were recognized as defensive weapons and, instead of the earlier offensive orientation, they operated with “aggressive spirit.”⁷³ While tanks became the primary antitank weapons, tank destroyers became highly mobile supporting artillery. They functioned as auxiliary artillery, together with tanks and antiaircraft artillery. The Tunisian operation led to increased numbers of field artillery, tank, and combat-engineer battalions.⁷⁴

The antiaircraft training cycle, which had been increased from thirteen to eighteen weeks before Kasserine Pass, was again lengthened in July 1943, this time to twenty-two weeks.⁷⁵ Yet the "most disappointing aspect of the 1943 maneuvers . . . was air-ground cooperation."⁷⁶ Planes frequently attacked friendly forces because of failure to display panels on the ground or to properly use pyrotechnics, and antiaircraft artillery continued to shoot down friendly planes. Close coordination of ground units and tactical supporting air units would be successfully resolved only after the Normandy invasion, when tactical air commands worked closely with each field army and when special radios enabled pilots to talk directly with the ground units they were assisting.⁷⁷ By the late summer of 1943, Army authorities agreed that combined-arms training had never been satisfactory. Infantry and armored officers had had inadequate training in each other's operations; higher commanders and staffs were inexperienced in coordinating operations and had a tendency to use units "in such dribbles that their effectiveness was lost." Not enough weapons and units had existed in 1942, or even in 1943, for effective combined-arms training.⁷⁸ Until late in 1943, armored and infantry divisions were unable to train together, and nondivisional units had only "limited opportunities for combined [arms] training."⁷⁹

As Army Ground Forces noted in March 1943, divisions in the United States had received only 50 percent of their authorized equipment in certain critical items, while nondivisional units had received a mere 20 percent. Thus, "shortcomings shown by American troops in combat in North Africa . . . were attributed . . . in large measure to lack of opportunity to train with enough weapons and ammunition."⁸⁰ Although Army Ground Forces had tried to issue full allowances to units in training, continuing shortages of equipment and supplies had made the practice impossible.⁸¹ On the other hand, a major confirmation of prewar outlook was the role of the division organized to fight as a self-contained organization.

The vision of how the U.S. Army was to fight in World War II was essentially sound. As McNair remarked in June 1943, a defensive attitude stimulated by the Battle of Kasserine Pass was "undermining the offensive spirit by which alone we can win battles."⁸² The late date and the short duration of the mobilization and organization process, of the development and procurement of weapons and equipment, and of the training cycle, together with necessary haste and improvisation, made impossible adequately preparing troops for the exigencies of what was to them the new and sobering reality of war. Americans at Kasserine "paid in blood the price of battlefield experience."⁸³ For Americans who had been imbued with an aggressive and offensive notion during training, the defensive Battle of Kasserine Pass imposed a role for which they were psychologically ill equipped. Yet the underlying cause of the American failure was discrepancy in numbers between the Allies and the Axis. The Axis built up its strength in Tunisia

faster than the Allies could, and the presence in the field of two Axis armies against a single Allied army (before Montgomery arrived) gave the Axis an indisputable advantage. Another trump card was the German and Italian troops' prior battle experience. Still another was superior Axis equipment, particularly tanks and guns. The close coordination of ground-air units by virtue of doctrine, training, and experience also was vitally important.

The Americans made many mistakes in this first large-scale engagement of the war in Europe, but they learned from their errors and made adjustments that enabled them to go on to victory in Tunisia and beyond. The defeat at Kasserine showed the Army what troops had to learn and to do. That they quickly became proficient in the warfare of the 1940s confirmed their spirit, their flexibility, their strong sense of purpose—their will to win.

Fifth Panzer Army, War Diary (Extract),
24 January 1943

Order for the conduct of operations in the south sector

1. American forces: 2 infantry and 2 armored divisions are advancing in the Tabessa - Feriana - Kasserine area with advanced elements in Sbeitla. Advanced security detachments are holding as heretofore the defile by Faïd, with reserves around Si bou Zid. A smaller force is in the Gafsa area with defensive *apparently* ~~the assignment~~/mission as before.

The intention of the American forces will be to ~~push~~ drive on Sfax or Gabes over ~~the~~ Faïd to destroy liaison between the Fifth Panzer Army and the German Italian Panzer Army.

2. The Fifth Panzer Army will gain the defile at Faïd, annihilate the enemy units in line there and block the mountain ridge on both sides of Faïd and toward the south in the Gafsa direction to prevent at that point any enemy drive in the direction of the sea.

3. Combat mission:

a. The 21st Pz Div., under the direct control of the army, will attack the enemy at Faïd with the forces at hand and elements of the Brigade Imperiale at the earliest possible moment, will destroy him and block the defile ~~by committing~~, using the attached elements of Brigade Imperiale, and by pushing forward security detachments to the mountain chain between Faïd and station de Sened will add to the security line of the Special Brigade Imperiale.

After the mission has been carried out reconnaissance will be pushed forward in the direction of Sbeitla to the extreme boundary on the road Hadjeb el Aïoun - Gafsa.

After accomplishing its mission the division will return to its former area leaving strong security detachments at the mountain.

Brigade Imperiali will place
For the execution of the mission/Kampfgruppe/Krüger-Haye and the armored assault group at La Fauconnerie under the control of the 21st Pz.Div. After the attack has been carried out these elements will return to the control of Brigade Imperiali. Particulars will be regulated directly between the 21st Pz.Div. and the XXX Army Corps.

Moreover the army will bring forward the following units and at their arrival place them under the command of the 21st Pz.Div.:

Panzer Bn. 190 (moved by marching to objective 7169)

March Bn. A 29 (moved by rail, O.Qu.T)

March Bn. A 23 (movement still to be ordered)

III - 8.8cm Flak 41

The execution ~~is~~ of the attack will not be made dependent on the arrival of these new units.

b. Special Brigade Imperiali, in the northern part of its sector, ~~has~~ will detail Kampfgruppe Krüger-Haye and the armored assault group at La Fauconnerie to the 21st Pz.Div. for the attack. ^{ying} After ~~occupation~~ and blocking the 21st Pz.Div. the defile at Faid, ~~it~~ will again assume with these units the security of the mountain ridge on both sides of Faid and toward the south adjoining on Dj. Boudinar. The taking over will be reported.

In the southern sector the special brigade will have ^{its main} its forces in line there to the area of the Sened station and will block steadily the mountain defile. At the pass between Sened and Sakket liaison with Centauro Div. will be established and maintained. The locality of Sened will be occupied by the Special Brigade Imperiali.

c. Div. Centauro will continue to reinforce its security detachments east of el Guettar by pushing forward ^{the} additional forces which are becoming

free at Gabès so that the mountain defiles here also can be blocked steadily. The mountain pass north of Sakket will be protected by a comparatively strong combat group and ~~will be~~ liaison will be maintained with the elements of the Brigade Imperiali in line there. Div. Centauro will be responsible for holding the mountain defile at Sakket.

4. Reconnaissance:

The 21st Pz.Div. will observe enemy tactics by ^avigorous reconnaissance as far as ~~possible~~ the line Sbeitla - Gafsa.

Reconnaissance by XXX A.C. as ordered.

The main body of the 21st Pz.Div., after winding up the attack, will hold itself mobile at the disposal of the army and will expedite replacements of shortages. Non-motorized elements and weapons can be pushed forward to the mountain passes southeast of Si bou Zid; for operational purposes they will then be under the control of the Special Brigade Imperiali.

6. Armored Signal Bn.190 will maintain radio communication with the 21st Pz.Div.; communication with XXX A.C. as formerly.

7. Army Headquarters: Rue de Lesneps 1, Tunis

8. Reports: The 21st Pz.Div. will report as early as possible the time of the attack on Faid.

The XXX A.C. will report the advance of elements Imperiali to Sened station and the occupation of the pass of Sakket by Div. Centauro.

Sources:

21st Pz.Div. Ia. Ktb. - Anlagen Nr.9

8.1.43 - 31.3.43

33 135/2

1st Armored Division, Report of Operations
(Extract), Maknassy, Tunisia, 27 January-
3 February 1943

~~RESTRICTED~~

HEADQUARTERS 1ST ARMORED DIVISION
A.P.O. 251 c/o Postmaster
New York City, N.Y.

18 October 1943.

SUBJECT: Report of Operations 1st Armored Division, MANASSY, TUNISIA,
27 January 43 to 3 February 43.

TO : The Adjutant General, U. S. Army, Washington, D.C.

| | | |
|---|-------------|---------------------------------------|
| CANCELLED | SECTION I | AUTHORITY. |
| | SECTION II | GENERAL. |
| | SECTION III | DISPOSITION OF TROOPS. |
| | SECTION IV | MANASSY OPERATION, 27 JAN - 3 FEB 43. |
| PROPERTY OF THE ADJUTANT GENERAL | | RESULTS OF OPERATION. |
| BOARD OF REVIEW COMMITTEE <i>LIG 30</i> | | SECTION <i>1/3</i> |
| | | IDENTITY |

In compliance with paragraph 10, AR 345-105, the report on operations by 1st Armored Division at MANASSY (T-7908), TUNISIA, 27 January 43 to 3 February 43 is hereby submitted.

SECTION II
GENERAL

1. THE ENEMY:

After the raid on STATION DE SENED on 24 January the enemy reoccupied the SAGED position and took FAID PASS from the French so that his general line along this front was then DJ SENDA (Y-2859), DJ EL ANA (1-3474), DJ SIADA (Y-4685) and DJ MAJOURA (T-4512), DJ ALCOUSSI (T-6024), DJ BOUDINAR (T-7938), DJ SIDI KRALIF (T-8265). (See map). Air reconnaissance reports indicated that the enemy was strengthening his MANASSY position particularly with armor.

2. THE DIVISION:

a. On 27 January CC "C" had returned to the BOU CHEBKA area from GAFSA after the STATION DE SENED raid. CC "B" was in the GUSSELTIA Valley. CC "A" had moved from SEITLA to SIDI BOU ZID. The remainder of the Division had remained in the BOU CHEBKA area.

b. On 27 January CC "C", consisting of 6 Inf (-1st & 2d bns), 1st Bn 13 AR, 68 FA Bn, D Co 16 Engr Bn, 2d Plat D Btry 443 CA (AA), A Co 47 Med Bn, B Co Maint Bn, Det 141 Sig Co, moved to FEINDIA prepared to operate against the enemy either in the direction of GAFSA or FAID. (See Inclosure No. 1).

c. On 28 January CC "C" (-1st Bn 13 AR) with 3d Bn 13 AR attached moved vicinity GAFSA. (See Inclosure No. 2). CC "B" commenced movement, on II Corps order, to BOU CHEBKA.

d. On 29 January CC "B" closed in new bivouac at BOU CHEBKA and commenced period of badly needed maintenance.

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e. On 30 Jan. the following units were attached to the Division:

| | |
|-----------------------|------------|
| 1st Bn 100 Inf | 1st Rcn Tr |
| Can Co 39 Inf | 33 FA Bn |
| 20 Inf (-2d & 3d Bns) | |

Troops were then regrouped as shown below.

SECTION III
DISPOSITION OF TROOPS - 30 JANUARY

DIV RCN - BOU CHEBKA

81 Rcn Bn (-B Co & 1 Pl D Co)
Rcn Fl Hq Co 16 Engr Bn

CC "C" - NW GAFSA

6 Inf (-1st & 2d Bns)
E Co and 1 Pl D Co 81 Rcn Bn
G Co 13 AR
C Btry 68 FA Bn
B Btry (-2 Pl) 443 CA (AA)
1 Pl D Co 16 Engr Bn

CC "D" - BOU CHEBKA

701 TD Bn (-A & B Cos)
3d Bn 13 AR (-G Co)
1st Bn 168 Inf
Can Co 39 Inf
D Co 16 Engr Bn (-1 Pl)
68 FA Bn (-C Btry)
1 Pl 443 CA (AA)

CC "A" - SIDI BOU ZID

1 AR (-1st & 2d Bns)
1st Bn 6 Inf
20 Inf (-2d & 3d Bns)
91 FA Bn
1 Rcn Tr
33 FA Bn
C Co 16 Engr Bn
A Co 701 TD Bn
601 TD Bn (-C Co)
D Btry (-2 Pl) 443 CA (AA)

DIV RESERVE - BOU CHEBKA

1st Bn 13 AR
2d Bn 1 AR
16 Engr Bn (-C & D Cos)
1 Pl 443 CA (AA)
D Btry 106 CA

CC "E" - BOU CHEBKA

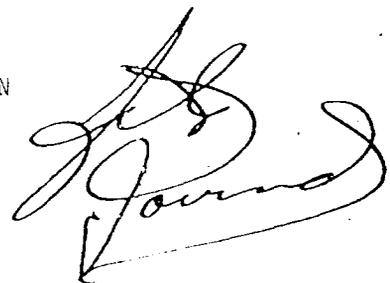
13 AR (-1st & 3d Bns)
2d Bn 6 Inf
27 FA Bn

SECTION IV
THE OPERATION

- 30 January Commanding General, 1st Armored Division issued verbal orders to CC "C" as follows: "Move from present area along GAFSA - SIDI BOU ZID road to point T-2712, thence cross-country to end of road at T-3566, thence northeast toward MAKNASSY road and hit in flank enemy force moving from MAKNASSY toward SIDI BOU ZID." CC "C" moved out as ordered at 1400 hours, and bivouaced for the night 25 miles north of GAFSA on the SIDI BOU ZID road.
- Afternoon of 30 January Field Order No. 4 was issued. (See Inclosure No. 3).
- During the night of 30-31 January CC "D" and Div Rcn moved from BOU CHEBKA to assembly positions five (5) miles East of GAFSA.
- 31 January CC "D", preceded by Div Rcn, launched an attack on STATION DE SENED. CC "A" made an unsuccessful thrust toward FAID. CC "C" having found no enemy force moving toward SIDI BOU ZID from MAKNASSY turned south per Division Order on the MAKNASSY - SIDI BOU ZID Road to contain the enemy in the MAIZILA PASS (T-7527).

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HEADQUARTERS 1ST ARMORED DIVISION
A.P.O. 251 c/o Postmaster
New York City, N.Y.



MEMORANDUM:

TO : Commanding General, 1st Armored Div.

1. The composition and locations of the units of the 1st Armored Div. are as follows:

a. DIV RCN - BOU CHEBKA
81st Rcn Bn

b. CC "A" - SBEITLA
1 AR (- 1st & 2d Bns)
1st Bn, 6 Inf
91 FA Bn
C Co, 16 Engr
A Co, 701 TD Bn
C Co, 47 Med Bn
A Co, Maint Bn
B Btry, (- 2 Pls), 443d CA
Det (Supply Bn & Tn Hq)

c. CC "B" - OUSSELTIA - will move from that location to vicinity BOU CHEBKA during hours of darkness starting 28 Jan. Will close at BOU CHEBKA night of 29-30

13 AR (-1st & 3d Bns)
2d Bn, 6 Inf
27 FA Bn
B Co, 16 Engr
B Co, 47 Med Bn
C Co, Maint Bn
B Co, Supply Bn

d. CC "C" - FERIANA
1st Bn, 13 AR (-1 Pl C Co)
6 Inf (- 1st & 2d Bns)
68 FA Bn
D Co, 16 Engr

1 Pl, 443d CA
Det 141 Sig Co
A Co, 47 Med Bn
B Co, Maint Bn

e. DIV RES - BOU CHEBKA
Hq & Hq Co, 1 AD
3d Bn, 13 AR
16 Engr Bn (-B, C & D Cos)
701 TD Bn (- A & B Cos)
Maint Bn (- A, B & C Cos)
2d Bn, 1 AR

Supply Bn (- B Co & Det)
47 Med Bn (- A, B & C Cos)
Tn Hq Co (- Det)
141 Sig (- Det)
Serv. Co, 1 AD

f. AT GAFSA
B Co, 701 TD Bn
1 Pl, C Co, 13 AR

g. 1st Bn, 1 AR - ORAN

HAMILTON H. HOWZE,
Lt. Col., G.S.C.,
A. C. of S., G-3.

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21st Panzer Division, Division Order for the Capture of the Faid Strongpoint, 26 January 1943

Division Order for the capture the Faid strong point.

1. Enemy

Sened station again in our hand since 25 Jan. Otherwise no change in the situation. The enemy is remaining quiet lately, in the air also.

Partioulars in enemy situation bulletin.

2. 21st Pz.Div. will continue under the direct control of the Fifth Army and will capture the narrows at Faid; it will annihilate the enemy units in line there and will block the mountain passes on both sides of Faid and farther to the south to Gafsa.

3. For that purpose the following units are temporarily attached:

From the Italian Brigade Imperiali

- a. Field Battalion T 2,
- b. 2 Italian Blackshirt companies
- c. 1 battery of Italian assault guns (8 - 7.5)

These elements will return to the control of the Brigade Imperiali after the mission has been carried out. The time for this will be ordered by the 21st Pz.Div.

4. Execution of the operation

I. Composition

2 Kampfgruppen will be formed.

a. Kampfgruppe Pfeiffer with northern group:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 2 Italian companies Blackshirts) |) under the command of an Italian major. |
| 1st Co., Field Bn T 2 | |
| 4 Italian assault guns | |
| 1 platoon 5cm antitank guns (2 guns) | |

Center group:

- 1 bn. Pz.Gr.Rgt.104
- 2d.Co., Field Bn. T & 2
- 1 platoon h. Inf. howitzer
- 4 Ital. assault guns
- 1 btry. 8.8 flak (41) of 4 guns
- 2 mine locating details

)
) under the
)
) command of
)
) Major Pfeiffer.
)

South Group:

- 1st Bn. 104th Pz. Gr. Rgt.
- 1 btry. (British guns) Arty. 155 ^{Regt.}
- 1 platoon 2 cm. Flak
- 2 mine locating details

)
) under the
)
) command of
)
) Capt. Kuhn

b. Kampfgruppe Grun with

- 1st Bn. Pz. Rgt. 5 (all tanks)
- 1/2 btry. (2 guns) 8.8 Flak (41)
- 1 platoon 2 cm. Flak
- 3 mine locating details

Following behind Kampfgruppe Grun, but not under its control:

the main body of Recon. Bn. 530

II. Missions:

a. Kampfgruppe Pfeiffer.

The north group with the Italian Black Shirt companies will assume the protection of the north flank in the general line of the mountain ridge 2 km east of 114 - Lake el Bahira; company T 2, supported by the assault guns and the antitank platoon will, at daybreak, take by surprise the pass at 117, destroy the enemy elements in line there and will block the crossings to the west.

The center group has the mission to destroy the enemy at Faid by an enveloping attack on both sides and to capture the defile by Faid. To that effect 1 company of Field Bn. T 2 under the direction of Lt. Krüger-Haye will push from the north over Hill 614 and attack the enemy by Faid from Dj. Kralif. The battalion of Pz.Gr.Rgt. 104, supported by 4 assault guns, 2 heavy ^{howitzers} inf. ~~guns~~, 1 battery of 8.8 Flak and the entire artillery (3 1/2 batteries) will attack Faid from the east in the early morning hours, closely encircling from both sides, detailing a flank security detachment to the south.

The south group, under the command of Capt. Kuhn, will force a crossing of the mountain on the pass road between 79103 - 7210 before daybreak and will destroy the enemy at 7910 (Rebaou) under protection against the enemy troops on Dj. Ksaira.

Particulars concerning the onset, ~~positions~~ especially the timing, will be assured by Major Pfeiffer.

b. Kampfgruppe Grün will reach on Y - 1 day before dark point 9704. From there the Kampfgruppe, after dark, will move over 9718 - 9502 - 9504 - 7226 - 7223 first on 7220, will exterminate the enemy in position there, then will turn first eastward over 7219, later northward on 7211 and will attack the enemy garrison at Faid from the rear.

Recon. Bn. 580 will follow Kampfgruppe Grün as far as 7223, its main body remaining there as support for ~~positions~~ elements of Kampfgruppe Grün which may have remained behind or which are coming back, and also ~~as~~ as reconnaissance base ~~positions~~ reconnoiter from here to the west as far as the road Hadjeb el Aioun - Gafsa.

Source:

21st Pz.Div. Ia, Ktb. Anlagen Nr.9 8.1.43 - 31.3.43

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Fifth Panzer Army, War Diary (Extract), 3-4 February 1943

Ground and air reconnaissances disclose nothing new in the picture presented by the enemy. The weak enemy air activity merely confirms that the enemy organizations intends first to improve his air force ~~installations~~ and supply installations in the rear area.

There is no change in the army's plans.

2. Morning and noon report to O.K.H. (Annex 980)

3 February 1943

1. Sequence of events:

On 3 Feb. the enemy feels forward with strong reconnaissance forces against our rear guard positions northwest or north of Zelten along the coastal road and just in the vicinity of the trail running near the coast. All the thrusts are repulsed and a few armored enemy vehicles are shot down. (Annex 981)

Long distance reconnaissance of German and Italian reconnaissance patrols as far as the line 80 km south-southwest of Fom Tatahouine-100 km southeast of Fom Tatahouine discloses no enemy observation in the entire south area. (~~Annex~~ Annex 982)

The O.B. inspects personally the defense sector in the west flank of the Mareth position between Djbel Tebaga and Matmata and discusses with Gen. Roncaglia the commitment of his Korpsgruppe. The O.B. intends in the next few days to withdraw the remaining forces employed in the Fom Tatahouine area and to put the entire Gruppe Mannerini under the control of Gen. Roncaglia. (Annex 983)

selects
Comando Supremo ~~by~~ a new boundary between the D.I. Panzerarmee and the 5. Panzerarmee, running as follows:

Hir el Kumizi (20 km northeast of Sfax) - Mezzouna - Meich--Sened (locality for the D.I. Panzerarmee) - Point 405 (16 km north of Gafsa) - river crossing 2 km south of Hir Barouka - river direction to the northwest. (Annex 984)

The boundary includes the Gafsa and Sfax area for the D.I. Panzerarmee.

Thereupon the army reports to Comando Supremo that according to the Duce's instructions all mobile units -so far as they are not already as position divisions in line/in the Mareth position and have taken over their sectors- are still standing as rear guards in the area northwest of Zelten-Ben Gardane-south Fom Tatahouine with the mission to delay the advance of the British Eighth Army to the west. In view of the importance of this mission the army is in no position to throw any mobile forces against a possible enemy threat from the ^{Area} ~~Gafsa~~ around Gafsa, whether in the Gabès direction or against the Mahares-Sfax line, as an important ^{part} /of the fighting power of the army had to be given over to the Fifth Pz. A.O.K. in the shape of the 21.Pz.Div. for the protection of the Sfax area. The army therefore suggests to let the former boundary (34° of latitude) remain and to have the new boundary effective only when the army rear guards have fallen back ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ behind the Mareth position because of superior enemy pressure.

Should there be grounds - unsuspected by the army- for the newly ordered boundary to go into effect, then the army must be given freedom of action in so far that in ~~such~~ case of threatening danger from the area around Gafsa, parts of the rear guard support could be put in line/ ~~to~~ ~~ward~~ ~~off~~ ~~the~~ ~~danger~~ to ward off the danger of an advance possibly more rapid ~~of~~ by /the British Eighth Army. (Annex 985)

(Situation map and reports see Annex 986)

Air situation: Compared to the previous days the enemy air activity was noticeably stronger; powerful bombing and Jabo units attacked the rear area especially.

Our Luftwaffe scored noticeable success in the repulse of the enemy air attacks.

Supply situation of the German troops:

The present requirements are assured in almost all services. A stock of supplies on a large scale as would be needed for the conduct of defensive

fighting of several weeks duration is not possible in the present circumstances. Nevertheless on the 20th of the month we have to reckon with the beginning of the British large scale attack against the Marath position.

Detailed situation is as follows:

| | | | | |
|----------------|-----------------------------------|---------|------|--|
| a. Fuel: | with the troops | 1,5 | V.S. | |
| | in depots in the rear | 1 | V.S. | |
| | what must be requisitioned | 10 | V.S. | |
| | Shortage | 7,5 | V.S. | or 75% |
| b. Ammunition: | with the troops | 0,7 | | basic load |
| | in rear depots | 1,0 | | " " |
| | what must be requisitioned troops | 3 | | " " |
| | " " " " depot | 3 | | " " |
| | Shortage | 4,3 | | " " 72% |
| c. Mines: | already laid or in depot | 42 000 | | antitank mines |
| | | 16 490 | | antipersonnel mines |
| | to be requisitioned | 240 000 | | antitank mines |
| | | 120 000 | | antipersonnel mines |
| | Total shortage | 300 610 | | antitank and antipersonnel mines 83% (Annex 987) |

Estimate of the situation and plans:

Despite the increase of the enemy air activity today there is still no intention of attack on the part of the enemy to be detected. The plans of the army for the 4. Feb. are unchanged.

Concerning an outline of these plans the ~~army~~ army reports, upon inquiry of Comando Supremo: as long as possible

"The army intends to hold/the present rearguard positions echeloned in depth in the area Zelten - Pisida - Ras Agedir, this area being favorable from the point of view of terrain. If the enemy exerts a frontal pressure it will doubtless be possible to hold only/these positions for several days, even against a superior enemy. But probably the enemy will attempt to carry out an enveloping movement perhaps through the el Assa area (40 km southwest of Zuara) or perhaps farther south, driving from the Ben Gardane direction, for the opening of these passes.

In such a case -quite possible despite terrain difficulties* and to which certain indications point- the present rear guard position will not be held long if the movement is carried out with strong forces as is to be assumed. The necessary reconnaissances and security measures against the described enemy encirclement possibility have been taken. The possibility to bring such an enveloping attempt to naught by a counterattack is offered by suitable forces and the 15. Pz. Div. is assembled in readiness in the area west of Ben Gardane for the purpose.

If on the other hand the situation forces the abandonment of the present rear guard positions, then the nearest defensive front of the rear guards will lie about 12 km west of Ben Gardane. It will not be possible to hold this position for long against superior enemy forces advancing on a broad front as it has no special advantages of terrain and can be surrounded on both sides. Because of the terrain features the rear guard will finally have to fall back to the high ground just northwest of Medenine. There and in the area as far as the Mareth ~~position~~ position it might be possible to prepare a longer delay for the enemy. The army intends to hold out as long as ever possible, especially in the ^{advance} positions located about 6-7 km in front of the main line of resistance, with strong forces composed of the present rear guards and elements of the position divisions, and to make use of every opportunity for counterthrust or counterattack.

How long ^{the advance of} ~~the advance of~~ the British Eighth Army to the Mareth position can be delayed depends first of all on enemy pressure. Moreover an enemy threat from the Gafsa area and the eventual necessity to employ against it mobile ^{only} which can/be provided out of the present rear guard troops, could lead to a modification in the intended conduct of operations against the Eighth Army and to a considerable acceleration of enemy pressure from the east ~~by~~ reason of the enforced weakening of the rear guard troops.

Under the present circumstances the army believes, though it does not affirm it, that probably a period of at least 10-14 days/^{free from enemy disturbance} can be gained for the improvement of the Mareth position .

All the units intended for employment in the Mareth line are working with all their might on the improvement of their positions.

Rear guard engagements will be carried out by the 15.Pz.Div., Lw.Jag. Brig.1, Pz.Gen.Rgt.Afrika, 2 reconnaissance battalions and 2 army artillery battalions under the orders of D.A.K. The main body of these forces is intended ~~for~~^{as} subsequent mobile reserve behind the front. (Annex 988)

2. Morning and noon report to O.K.H. (Annex 989)

4 February 1943

1. Sequence of events:

Enemy pressure against the rearguard positions northwest of Zelten is becoming stronger. Despite violent resistance of the elements of the Lw. Jg.Brig.1 in line there the enemy pushes forward to the foremost positions under strong artillery protection. During the entire day the enemy who by evening ~~was~~ had been reinforced in the way of artillery by 5 batteries, takes our positions under ~~his~~ violent fire. (Annex 990)

An increase in enemy reconnaissance activity is discernible along the border, while, with the exception of an enemy group at Bir et Talagh (70 km south-southeast of Ben Gardane) the south area is as yet free of enemy. (Annex 991)

(Situation map and reports see Annex 992)

Air situation:

raids
During the repulse of repeated ~~attacks~~ of strong enemy bombing units on objectives in rear army area our Luftwaffe downed 8 enemy planes.

Supply situation of the German troops: same as yesterday.

Estimate of the situation and intentions:

Today's enemy pressure presages a strong attack against the rear-guard position northwest of Zelten ~~on~~^{on} 5 Feb. At the same time an attempt at envelopment from the el Assa area to the northwest is to be expected.

The army intends to repulse all the attempts at encirclement by the alerted forces of the D.A.K.; however it will withdraw the foremost elements of the Lw. Jg. Brig. 1 to the border position west of Pisida to avoid another costly engagement.

Ground and air reconnaissance disclosed no change in the general ~~enemy~~ enemy picture.

The O.B. leaves in the forenoon for the area southeast of Gafsa and asks the commander of the Italian Pz. Div. Centauro to report ^{on} the commitment of his division in the Guettar and Maknassi area. The O.B. has the impression that the forces of the division, parts of which are in line somewhere else or have not yet arrived, will not be sufficient to intercept a decisive enemy assault from the Gafsa area over Guettar ~~in~~^{on} Gabès or over Maknassi ~~in~~^{on} Sfax. The O.B. therefore decides to strengthen the resistance in this sector ~~by~~ through ~~x~~ some mobile German forces. At the close of its rearguard engagements in the border area the Lw. Jg. Brig. 1 will be transferred to the area between Gabès and el Hamma as mobile reserve of the army. It will then be available ~~for~~^{for} mobile employment in the western direction (Gafsa), in southwestern direction (Matmata) or also in southeastern direction (Mareth).

(Annex 993)

Hence follows the necessity of a regrouping at the Mareth front, as heretofore the use of the Lw. Jg. Brig. 1 was provided ^{for} in the sector of the XX. A. K. The army issues orders to the corps for the Div. Trieste and Jungfaschisten to take over the sector of the Lw. Jg. Brig. 1. The 90. le. Afr. Div. is placed under the control of the XX. A. K. The boundary line between the

XXI A.K. and the XX.A.K. becomes thereby the ~~limit~~ boundary between Div. Spezia and the 90.1e Afr.Div. The 164.1e.Afr.Div. will ^{be} placed under the ~~control~~ control of the XXI.A.K. as soon as the division withdraws its right flank to the west after the Fom Tatahouine mission. (Annex 994)

In the afternoon the O.B. confers with Gen. Messe concerning the problems a ~~possibility~~ possible enemy thrust from the Gafsa area would create. Gen. Messe agrees to hold a comparatively strong mobile reserve in readiness in the Gabès area. It is therefore decided that in addition the 7.Bers.Rgt. will be held available and not, as originally intended, put in line in the sector of Gen. Roncaglia.

The O.B. explains then to Gen. Messe that the increasingly manifest danger of a thrust of strong enemy forces from the Gafsa area to the coast against the general line Gabès-Sfax can be met by purely defensive measures or through an attack that would anticipate the enemy movement and batter his assembly positions. In any case the forces of the 5.Pz.Armeé as well as those of the D.I. Panzerarmee will have to be put in line at once, ~~and~~ since separately neither the one nor the other - to say nothing of the intended new army boundary- would be strong enough considering its other missions and the extremely thinly occupied front.

It is hardly necessary to look any closer for a purely defensive solution. It can be safely assumed, however, that the forces heretofore employed in the area east or southeast of Gafsa are in no way adequate to resist a serious enemy assault and that ~~in~~ⁱⁿ such a case mobile forces -probably from both armies- will have to be thrown in and moved forward. As far as the D.I. Panzerarmee is concerned such a measure will perforce result in a weakening of the present rearguards and therefore lead to a more rapid advance of the British Eighth Army, or later will be at the cost of the mobile reserves urgently needed at the rear of the Mareth front

proper as well as in its deep northwest flank. The later the time for such a necessity arrives the nearer ~~xxx~~ will have the British Eighth Army ~~xxx~~ advanced to the Mareth position, and on the other hand the farther will have the preparations for attacks against the front of the 5/Pz.Armees have progressed. There is therefore danger of ~~the~~ simultaneous launching of an enemy large scale attack of the entire front of the two panzerarmies.

This danger does not seem threatening at present. A successful attack from our side in the area around Gafsa with all its consequences for friend and foe, results which, on our side, would doubtless have considerable advantages for the general conduct of operations in Tunisia, would therefore perhaps still be possible from the point of view of time.

Prerequisites

~~Assumptions~~ for the success of such an attack are:

1. Rapid and surprising execution within the next few days
2. Concentrated attack of adequately strong forces.
3. Coordinated command without regard to army boundaries.

With regard to the concentrated commitment of forces, the thrust of a strong detachment of the 5.Pz.Armees in the general direction of the north-east, and the attack of a detachment ~~from~~ ^{of} the D.I.Panzerarmee from the south is indicated. Both attack groups would need to have at their disposal, beside sufficient forces, the greatest number possible of tanks.

On the side of the D.I.Panzerarmee it would be a question of the 15. Pz.Div. only. It would have to be reinforced with infantry and artillery (main combat strength at present: 51 tanks ready for action, 5 weak companies of Pz.Grenadiers, 1 light and 1 heavy artillery battalion, a total of 36 medium and heavy antitank guns). This division forms the backbone of the forces committed to ~~the~~ delay ~~of~~ the advance of the ~~Rixit~~ British Eighth Army and is located at the present time in the area directly west of Ben Gardane. Its removal could, under certain circumstances, mean an early

appearance of the British before the Mareth position, especially if the enemy obtains rapid knowledge of this transfer of forces. This would be part of the risk that we would have to put up with. The other lies therein that, according to circumstances, the 15.Pz.Div. after successful execution of the attack on Gafsa would remain tied down there resisting enemy counter-attacks or simply because of a lack of relieving forces, and therefore would be unavailable for the direct support of the defensive fighting in the Mareth position. However there is still the chance that the British Eighth Army is not yet far enough, from the point of view of supplies, to be able to pursue immediately with strong forces as far as the Mareth position upon the removal ~~withdrawal~~ of the 15.Pz.Div. In any case it must endeavor ~~to~~ to free ^{certain} the 15.Pz.Div. as soon as possible as it will be, under/circumstances, the decisive reserve for the Mareth front.

The army submits a suitable estimate ^{approved by Gen. Messe also,} of the situation/to Comando Supremo, and requests a decision as to whether the attack ~~operations~~ ^{is} still held possible against Gafsa ~~may~~ to be carried out or whether it seems no longer feasible. A quick decision is all the more important as in case of the affirmative the 15.Pz.Div. would need 3 full days for the approach march and the moving into assembly position. (Annex 995)

2. Morning and noon reports to O.A.H. (Annex 996)

5 February 1943

1. Sequence of events:

The advanced elements of the Lw. Jg. Brig. 1 were withdrawn to the main position west of Pisida during the night of 4/5 Feb. according to plans and without enemy pressure. During the day the enemy feels forward at first with reconnaissance patrols and follows only hesitantly. (Annex 997)

The activity of enemy reconnaissance forces in the area northwest

6

*Fifth Panzer Army, Operation FRUEHLINGS-
WIND, 8 February 1943*

Order for the Operation "Frühlingwind"

(Map 1: 200 000)

Directions for combat operations

1. In front the 21st Pz.Div. the Americans hold with comparatively weak forces, probably combat command A, B, E, the area west of Faid as far as the Sbeitla defile and is completing the concentration of the main body of his troops in the Tebessa area.
2. The mission of the Fifth Panzer Army is to weaken the Americans by destroying some of his elements and thereby confuse and delay his advance.
3. For the execution of this mission the Fifth Panzer Army will commit on A-day ^{headquarters} the 10th and 21st Pz.Divisions under the command of an operational staff from the Hqs of the Fifth Panzer Army, and also strong forces of the Luftwaffe to destroy the Americans in the area west of Faid, and according to the development of the situation, take possession of Kef Touila with elements turning in to the north, or with elements advancing to the southwest, annihilate the enemy units standing in the Gafsa area.
4. To that effect I issue the following orders:
 - a. 10th Pz.Div. (in its present composition in the ^{Sbikha} area) will move in night marches and reach the area east of Faid at 7945 by the morning of 11 Feb. 43. Early on A-day the division, crossing the defile by Faid before daybreak, will fall in with weak mobile elements ~~on~~ both sides of the Faid - Sbeitla on 7240 - 41, with mobile elements over 7214 -7 or 16 - 43 on 44-41 and will annihilate the enemy in the area of the Dj.Lessonda and south thereof. The road to Sbeitla will be covered by a small force.
 - b. The 21st Pz.Div. will leave the static elements in line in the defile

by Faid and at 79103 in their positions they are now occupying for the protection of the advance of the 10th Pz.Div. ~~With~~ At the arrival of the 10th Pz.Div. these elements will be placed temporarily under the control of that division.

On A-day the 21st Pz.Div. will ~~attack~~^{advance} with a strong group over 7226-25 - 24 - 31 - ~~22~~ 32 - 22 on Sidi bou Zid and will annihilate the enemy located east of Dj. el Kebar and at Sidi bou Zid. Weaker elements will be pushed forward to 7255 to cover the west flank. The road Gafsa - Sidi bou Zid will be mined.

The necessary concentration movements for this will be carried out by 11 Feb. '43.

e. Boundary line between 10th and 21st Pz.Div.: 71103 (10th Pz.) - 7210 (10th Pz.) - 7238 (21st Pz.) - 7239 (21st Pz.) - 7250 (21st Pz.) - 7273 (10th Pz.) - 7297 (10th Pz.).

5. ~~ist~~ Luftwaffe

Air Force commander Tunis and Air Force commander Africa are requested to support the attack by committing their strongest forces. It is a question of destroying the enemy forces located west of the Faid defile, and of preventing the enemy forces in the Sbeitla - Tebessa area ~~ix~~ from coming to their aid.

Reconnaissance in the area: Pichon - Sbiba - Tebessa - Gafsa - Maknassy. It is requested that a air support party be detailed to each the 10th and 21st Pz.Div.

6. Occupation of the assembly areas will reported through the 10th and 21st Pz.Divs.

7. The first C.P. of ~~the~~ Command Hqs. will probably be La Fauconnerie (7944)

von Arhim.

Source: 21st Pz.Div. Is. Kriegstagebuch - Aufmarsch Nr. 9/8.1.43 - 31.3.
33 135/2

7

1st Armored Division, Report of Operations,
Sbeitla, Tunisia, 3-18 February 1943

HEADQUARTERS 1ST ARMORED DIVISION
APO 251 - c/o Postmaster,
New York City, N.Y.

16 October 1943.

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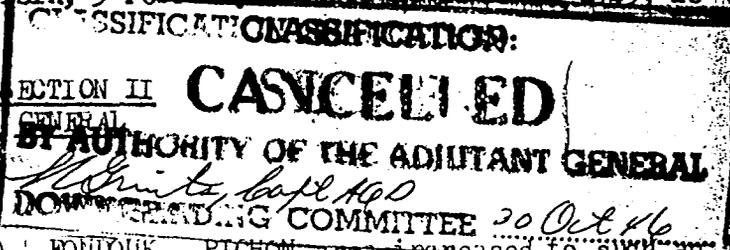
SUBJECT: Report of Operation 1st Armored Division, SBEITLA, TUNISIA,
3 February 1943 to 18 February 1943.

TO : The Adjutant General, U. S. Army, Washington, D.C.

SECTION I - AUTHORITY.
SECTION II - GENERAL.
SECTION III - DISPOSITION OF TROOPS.
SECTION IV - SBEITLA OPERATION.
SECTION V - RESULTS OF OPERATION.

SECTION I
AUTHORITY

1. In compliance with paragraph 345-105, the report on operations by 1st Armored Division at SBEITLA, TUNISIA, 3 February 1943, is hereby submitted.



1. THE ENEMY:

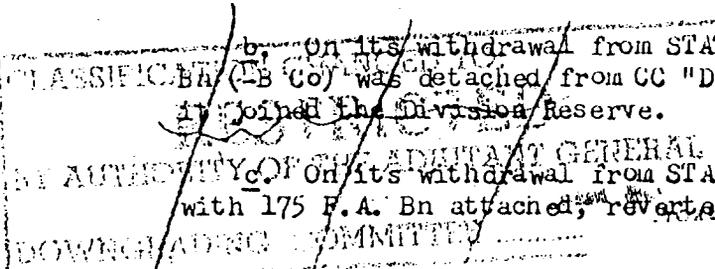
Enemy pressure on the FAID - FONDOUK - PICHON area increased to such an extent that it became necessary to abandon the thrust in the direction of MAKNASSY and the coast. The enemy strongly held FAID Pass and bitterly contested all attempts at detailed reconnaissance of the position. Air reconnaissance failed to reveal any particular movement of the enemy or any enemy concentration at any specific point.

2. THE DIVISION:

a. The Division had the mission of containing the enemy in the FAID - FONDOUK position (See Inclosures #1 and #3 attached). CC "D" became Corps Reserve when it moved to BOU CHEBKA 3 - 4 February. CC "B" was under First Army at MAKTAR. With CC "C" in the HADJEB EL ALOUN area and CC "A" in the SIDI BOU ZID area, the front of the Division (-CC "B" & CC "D") extended from DJ TROZZA (O-7015) to the passes south of DJ KSAIRA (T-7847), a distance of approximately 50 miles (See Map).

b. On its withdrawal from STATION DE SEWED night 3-4 February, 81 Rcn (LB Co) was detached from CC "D" and moved via THELEPTE to SBEITLA, where it joined the Division Reserve.

c. On its withdrawal from STATION DE SEWED night 3-4 February, 168 R.C.T., with 175 F.A. Bn attached, reverted to control II Corps.



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d. On its withdrawal from STATION DE SENED night 3-4 February, B Co 13 AR was attached to 3d Bn 26 Inf and moved to GAFSA.

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SECTION III
DISPOSITION OF TROOPS - 4 FEBRUARY

CC "A" - SIDI BOU ZID

1 AR (-1st & 2d Bns)
1st Bn 6 Inf
26 Inf (-2d & 3d Bns)
91 FA Bn
33 FA Bn
C Co 16 Engr Bn
A Co 701 TD Bn
B Co 81 Rcn Bn
12 Guns (443 CA)

CC "B" - VICINITY MAKTAR

(Under 1st Army)
13 AR (-1st & 3d Bns)
2d Bn 1 AR
2d Bn 6 Inf
27 FA Bn
601 TD Bn (-C Co)
A Co 16 Engr Bn
Pl B Btry 443 CA

CC "C" - HADJEB EL AOUN

6 Inf (-1st & 2d Bns)
G Co 13 AR
C Btry 68 FA Bn
1 Pl B Btry 443 CA
B Co 701 TD Bn
1 Pl D Co 16 Engr Bn

CC "D" - BOU CHEBKA

(Corps Reserve)
701 TD Bn (-A & B Cos)
3d Bn 13 AR (-G Co)
D Co 16 Engr Bn (-1 Pl)
68 FA Bn (-C Btry)
3 Guns, D Btry 443 CA

DIV HQ, DIV RESERVE - SBETTLA

Div Hq
1st Bn 13 AR (-B Co)
16 Engr Bn (-A, C & D Cos)
2 Guns B Btry 443 CA

SECTION IV
SBETTLA OPERATION

1. 5-13 February:

The Division was engaged in extensive patrolling and strengthening of its defensive positions, particularly in the FALD sector, with attention to mining and wiring the DJ LESSOUDA (T-6767) and DJ KSAIRA (T-7851) positions. Under an explicit directive from II Corps (See Inclosure #2 attached), the two above mentioned positions were heavily mined and wired. Such infantry as was available was dug in, and the tanks were held in mobile reserve in the vicinity of SIDI BOU ZID.

2. 6-8 February:

- 168 RCT (-1st Bn) and 1st Bn 17 FA were attached to 1st Armored Division and joined CC "A". They occupied defensive positions on DJ LESSOUDA (T-6767) and DJ KSAIRA (T-7650).

3. 8 February:

- 26 RCT (-2d & 3d Bns), with 33 FA Bn attached, was released to control II Corps and moved to FERIANA.

4. Night 9-10 February:

- CC "D" moved to FERIANA and was attached to 26 RCT.

5. 11 February:

- Hq CC "D" and 701 TD Bn (-A & B Cos) were released from attachment to 26 RCT and moved to SBETTLA.

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6. 12 February:

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701 TD Bn (-A, B & C Cos) was attached to, and joined, CC "C".

7. 14 February:

a. At 0630 hours the enemy began a heavy shelling of the DJ LESSOUDA (T-6767) position and followed it immediately by a tank attack in a wide northwest sweep around DJ LESSOUDA. By 0830 hours more than 40 enemy tanks had encircled DJ LESSOUDA and were along the FAID - SBEITLA road heading south. Continuous and heavy enemy air attacks were launched during the entire day. Shortly after the encirclement of the DJ LESSOUDA position it was apparent that the enemy had been successful in debauching from FAID Pass. Tanks and infantry began moving on SIDI BOU ZID from a position just north of DJ KSAIRA (T-7851), and considerable enemy troops were observed coming out of MAIZILA Pass (T-7707).

b. During the day, 168 Infantry (-1st & 2d Bns) under Colonel Drake, which occupied the DJ KSAIRA and GARET HADID (T-6848) positions, had been almost completely surrounded, but was maintaining a strong defense in both positions. Neither position was overrun. Contact was maintained with Colonel Drake by radio for about 24 hours after the encirclement.

c. The force on DJ LESSOUDA, consisting of 2d Bn 168 Infantry, G Co 1 AR and Rcn Co 1 AR, was also surrounded, but continued the attempt to fight its way out.

d. The tanks of CC "A" were outnumbered by at least 2 to 1. Due to the rapidity of movement of the enemy, 3d Bn 1 AR was placed in a very poor defensive position, but engaged the enemy

e. Just prior to nightfall CC "A" took up a defensive position in the vicinity of CR T-5266. The force at this time consisted of Hq CC "A", 1 AR (-1st & 2d Bns) with appreciable losses in the 3d Bn, B Btry 68 FA Bn, 91 FA Bn consisting of 9 guns and 2 guns from A Co 701 TD Bn, and 1st Bn 6 Inf which had not been engaged during the day.

f. 68 FA Bn (- B Btry) was released from attachment to 26 RCT and moved to vicinity SBEITLA where it was attached to CC "C".

8. Night 14-15 February:

-2d Bn 1 AR moved from MAIFAR and joined CC "C".

9. 15 February:

a. Based on orders from II Corps to seek out and destroy all enemy armor in the area, CC "C" moved south from HADJEB EL AOUN to launch a counter-attack on SIDI BOU ZID. CC "A" was ordered to hold present position, reorganize, and be prepared to support counter-attack of CC "C".

b. The attack of CC "C" progressed slowly during the day. Enemy resistance appeared to be light, and 2d Bn 1 AR, the Medium Tank Bn which was leading the attack of CC "C", approached SIDI BOU ZID from the north and west in deployed formation. Some artillery fire and bombing was encountered during this initial movement. At 1518 hours 2d Bn 1 AR received heavy artillery

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fire from a position north of SIDI BOU ZID. The 3d Bn 6 Inf was moved forward and passed through the artillery. At 1527 hours the left flank of 2d Bn 1 AR was located approximately 2 miles northeast of SIDI BOU ZID and was proceeding toward the town slowly. At about 1600 hours the 2d Bn 1 AR and the artillery forward observers began reporting enemy tanks to the front and northeast and southwest flanks. At 1651 hours Lt. Col. Alger, commanding the 2d Bn 1 AR, reported that he was heavily engaged with the enemy in a moving tank battle, but that he had the situation in hand. At 1740 hours 3d Bn 6 Inf, which had moved in following the tanks, reported enemy tanks attacking its right flank and rear. Although the infantry attempted to resist the tank attack with assault guns, it was apparent that they would be unable to stem the tide of the attack on such flat and open terrain. At 1800 hours the entire command was ordered to break contact with the enemy and withdraw to the vicinity of DJ MAZRA. Due to the extent of the fighting and failure of radio contact, Lt. Col. Alger never received this order so far as is known. Actually, at this time his force was completely surrounded by the enemy. Only 4 tanks and a small number of dismounted men returned to the rally point.

10. Night 15-16 February:

a. Patrols were sent out to attempt to contact the 2d Bn 1 AR, but the area west of SIDI BOU ZID was strongly in enemy hands and heavily patrolled. Attempts were made to relieve the forces on DJ LESSOUA (T-6767) and DJ KSARA (T-7851), but the rapid and well organized advance of the enemy prevented our reaching them. 168 RCT was ordered to attempt to fight its way out, but only scattered remnants reached our lines.

b. Having been released to the 1st Armored Division, CC "B" moved from MAZRA to SBETLA to assist the remaining elements of CC "A" and CC "C" in the defense of SBETLA.

11. 16 February:

Commanding General 1st Armored Division received orders orally from Commanding General II Corps to hold the SBETLA line at all costs until 1100 hours 17 February. CC "C" was attached to CC "A". CC "A" and CC "C" prepared defensive positions east and south of SBETLA. The enemy did not resume the attack, but confined his actions to reconnaissance and regrouping of troops.

12. 17 February:

a. Our troops were reorganized. Orders were received from II Corps that due to enemy pressure along the GAFSA - FERIANA line the Division would withdraw through the KASSERINE Pass. At 0900 hours the enemy attacked in force, but was held east of SBETLA until 1500 hours.

b. The plan of withdrawal was executed as follows: CC "A" withdrew to the north to the vicinity of SBIBA. CC "C" and Div Reserve withdrew along the SBETLA - KASSERINE axis. CC "B" covered the withdrawal from SBETLA along the south flank and withdrew slowly, covering the passage of CC "C" and Div Reserve through the KASSERINE Pass. At approximately 0300 hours 18 February CC "B", the rear of the Division, had cleared the Pass.

c. While CC "B" was still going through KASSERINE Pass the following message was received from the Commanding General II Corps: "HIGHLY IMPORTANT DIVISION ARRIVE NEW BIVOUAC AREA 10 MILES SOUTHWEST TEBESSA AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. MOQUILLIN (CC "A") MOVING TO JOIN YOU THERE."

13. 18 February:

a. By daylight the Division (- CC "A") was on the move to the new area.

b. CC "A" in the vicinity of Solba was relieved late in the day by the 34th Infantry Division and moved to join the balance of the 1st Armored Division in the vicinity of EL MA EL ABIOD. (See Map - Inclosure No. 5).

14. GENERAL:

During this period of intense activity and rapid movement neither Corps nor Division published a formal Field Order. The action was directed by radio or telephone between Commanding General 1st Armored Division and Commanding General II Corps, or by contact between their representatives.

SECTION V
RESULTS OF OPERATIONS

1. GENERAL:

a. Elements of 10th, 15th, and 21st Panzer Divisions and 601st Panzer Abteilung (AK VI Tanks) were definitely identified in this action, and observers reported seeing totals in excess of 100 enemy tanks engaged on 14 February and again on 15 February. Since this represented the bulk of the enemy armor in North Africa, it must be assumed that the enemy had thrown all his available means into a supreme effort to knock out the American forces in Southern Tunisia before they could operate in support of the Eighth British Army's attack on the Mareth line. In this the enemy would have been completely successful had it not been for the immediate availability of replacement and reserve supplies of materiel and troops. The enemy did gain complete control of the area GAFSA - FERRANA - KASSERINE - SBIBA - FICHON, and he defeated in detail those elements of II Corps which were opposed to him.

b. Although the withdrawal of the remnants of the Division from SBEITLA to KASSERINE was successful, it had suffered defeat in detail from SIDI BOU ZID to SBEITLA. During the first two days of the engagement (14 & 15 February) the Division, without full control of its troops, was forced to operate with a single combat command, containing only one battalion of tanks each, in contact with the enemy on each of these days. Hence the entire force of the Division was never in a position to be concentrated against the enemy. When the Division (less losses) was finally assembled, the withdrawal from SBEITLA was accomplished without appreciable loss.

2. LOSSES:

a. Enemy:

30 Tanks
5 A.T. Guns
2 Half-Tracks
6 Trucks
200 Men

Due to the confusion attendant with this action, no accurate estimate of the losses inflicted on the enemy can be made. However, it is felt that the enemy losses were far in excess of those listed.

b. Losses:

100 medium tanks
20 half-tracks
10 artillery pieces
45 men killed
123 men wounded
760 men missing
187 men known captured (including Col. Drake, C.O. 163 Inf Regt.,
Lt. Col. J.K. Waters, Exec. Off. 1 AD, and Lt. Col. J.D. Alger, C.O. 2d
Bn 1 AD)

Practically all of these losses were suffered in two days
(14-15 February).

For the Commanding General:


W. L. SCHMIDT,
Major, A.G.D.,
Adjutant General.

5 Inclosures:

Incl #1 - FO #5 1 AD
Incl #2 - Letter CG II Corps to CG 1 AD
Incl #3 - Message from CG II Corps to CG 1 AD &
Message from CG 1 AD to CG CC "A"
Incl #4 - Journal
Incl #5 - Operation map

Hq 1st Arm'd Div
in the Field
1200 hrs, 3 February 1943.

FIELD ORDER)

NO. . . . 5)

MAPS: OS,GS 4227 - Sheets 13,14,15,17,18,19,21,22,23 - Scale: 1/200000.

1. a. Omitted.

b. (1) French Troops previously holding FIAD Pass have been driven out or destroyed. French still hold FOMNDOUK - PICHON Area, but those troops are poorly armed.

(2) CC "B" moved night Feb. 2-3 to vicinity GUSSELTIA where it came under command of the Commanding General, 1st Army.

2. The 1st Arm'd Div (- Dets), with attached troops, will contain the enemy in the FAID, FOMNDOUK and DJ MAIZILA positions by quick reinforcement of French troops where the situation indicates, by active reconnaissance and patrols, by the use of artillery, and by the use of mobile striking forces to counter-attack enemy penetrations.

TROOPS

CC "A" McQuillin

CO, CC "A", Comdg.
1 AR (-1st & 2d Bn)
1st Bn, 6 Inf
26 Inf (-2d & 3d Bn)
91 FA Bn
33 FA Bn
C Co 16 Engr
A Co 701 TD
B Co 81 Ren
12 Guns, 443

CC "B" (Robinet)

CO, CC "B" Comdg
13 AR (-1st & 3d Bn)
2d Bn, 1 AR
2d Bn, 6 Inf
27 FA Bn
601 TD (- C Co)
A Co, 16 Engr
1st Pl B Btry, 443 AA

CC "C" (Stack)

CO, 6 Inf, Comdg
6 Inf (-1st & 2d Bn)
G Co, 13 AR
C Btry, 68 FA
2d Pl B Btry, 443 AA
B Co 701 TD

DIVISION RESERVE

1st Bn, 13 AR (- B Co)
16 Engr (-A, C, D Co)
2 Guns, 3d Pl B Btry,
443 AA

CC "D" (Marais)

CO, Div Arty, Comdg.
81 Ren (- B Co)
701 TD (-A, B Cos)
3d Bn, 13 AR (-G Co)
B Co, 13 AR
168 ROT
D Co, 16 Engr
68 FA Bn (- C Btry)
175 FA Bn (- G Btry)
2 Guns, 2d Pl D Btry
443 AA

3. a. CC "A" McQuillin will execute Division Mission within its zone of action:
South Boundary: DJ MESOUSSI
North Boundary: DJ EZ ZAOUIA - DJ EL HENNDI - O ZIROUD (All Excl)

Inclosure #1

In case of attack involving both zone of action and if communication with Div is out CC "A" will coordinate its action with that of CC "C" on its North Flank.

b. CC "C" (Stack) will execute Division Mission within its zone of action.

South Boundary: DJ EZ ZAOUIA - DJ EL HENNDI - O ZEROUH all Incl)
North Boundary: DJ EL ABIED - DJ TROZZA (All Incl)

In case of enemy attack involving both zones of action, and if communication with Div is out, CC C will coordinate its action with that of CC "A" on its South Flank.

g. CC "D" (Maraist) will continue attack until present mission is completed, and will then return to Corps Reserve at Bou Chebka. When CC "D" has withdrawn to Corps Reserve it will dispatch the 81 Ren Bn (- B Co) and that part of C Co, 701 TD Bn not armed with TD Guns to SBEITLA to join the Division Reserve. The 168 ROT moves to SBEITLA under Corps Control.

d. Division Reserve remains at SBEITLA.

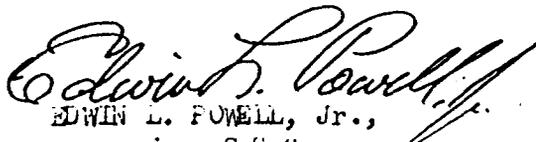
4. See Administrative Order Number 4.

5. Division Command Post:

Division Command Post remains at SBEITLA until further orders.

ORLANDO WARD
Commanding.

A TRUE COPY


EDWIN L. POWELL, Jr.,
Major, G.S.C.,
Ass't. A. C. of S., G-3.

HEADQUARTERS II CORPS
APO #302

11 February 1943.

SUBJECT: Defense of FAID Position.

TO : Commanding General, 1st Armored Division.

1. You will take immediate steps to see that the following points concerning defense of the FAID Position are put into effect:

a. Scheme of Defense: DJ. KSAIRA on the South and DJ. LESSOUDA on the North are the key terrain features in the defense of FAID. These two features must be strongly held, with a mobile reserve in the vicinity of SIDI BOU ZID which can rapidly launch a counter attack. Plans for all possible uses of this reserve should be prepared ahead of time. A battalion of infantry should be employed for the defense of DJ. KSAIRA, and the bulk of a battalion of infantry together with a battery of artillery and company of tanks for the defense of DJ. LESSOUDA. Remainder of artillery is at present satisfactorily located. It should, however, furnish its own local protection, and be prepared to shift rapidly.

b. Additional Reserves: The 1st Battalion, 6th Infantry, now under your control, should immediately send a liaison officer to Hq., CC A. Inasmuch as this Battalion will likely be employed by McQuillian should an attack in the FAID area develop, the Battalion Commander in collaboration with McQuillian should prepare plans for the use of his Battalion. These plans should insure rapid movement and employment of this Battalion once it has been ordered.

c. Reconnaissance: It is extremely important that reconnaissance and counter reconnaissance be conducted by you from HADJEB EL AOUN on the North to the pass between DJ. MAIZTLA and DJ. GOULEB on the South. In this area strong listening posts should be established 24 hours a day from which raids, when appropriate, can be conducted. It is essential that this reconnaissance and counter reconnaissance link up with that now being conducted by the 1st British Derby Yeomanry. The force now at McQuillian's disposal is not sufficient for the area for which he is responsible. The bulk of your 81st Reconnaissance Battalion should be used in the area HADJEB EL AOUN - MAIZTLA - GOULEB PASS.

d. Patrols: It is vital that strong infantry foot patrols be sent forward at night from DJ LESSOUDA and DJ KSAIRA. These patrols must be offensive. They must keep track of the enemy's strength and organization. They should be especially watchful for any attempt of the enemy to debouch from the passes at night. They must take prisoners. It is also important that these patrols locate the presence of minefields, if any, in areas like the gap between DJ REHAIB and DJ BOU DZEL. The latter would, of course, be of great importance in the event we decide to capture FAID.

e. Use of Wire, AT Mines, Trip Wire, etc.: I desire that you make maximum use of all available means to strengthen the positions outlined above. The necessary materiel is available and should be used immediately.

Inclosure #2

- 1 -

f. Photography: I have instructed my G-2 to furnish you as soon as possible a photographic strip covering the area: Pass at T8358 - FAID PASS - REBOU - MATLEG PASS. I have asked that every effort be made to secure good pictures of the Pass at T8358, FAID PASS, and MATLEG PASS.

2. I desire that a copy of this directive, together with your own comments, be sent to McQuillian.

3. You will inform me when the instructions enumerated in this directive have been complied with.

L. R. FREDENDALL,
Major General, U.S.A.,
Commanding.

(The below was written in longhand.)

In other words I want a very strong active defense and not just a passive one. The enemy must be harassed at every opportunity.

Reconnaissance must never be relaxed — especially at night.

Positions indicated must be wired and mined now.

A certified true copy.


EDWIN L. POWELL, Jr.,
Major, G.S.C.,
Ass't. A. C. of S., G-3.

Fifth Panzer Army, War Diary (Extract), 10-17
February 1943

Panzer Divisions and 2 -3 Inf. Divisions can have their main body in readiness".
(Enemy information bulletin No.2/43 according to the situation of 9 Feb.

Annex 1023)

2. Morning and noon report to O.K.H. (Annex 1024)

10 February 1943

1. Sequence of events:

The strong rain which has lasted for two days has softened the ground considerably and limits movements and combat activity.

In the border sector the 15.Pz.Div., entrusted since this forenoon with the conduct of the rearguard engagements, is repulsing weak enemy panzer thrusts in the area east of Taghelmit. In front of the sector of the Lw.Jg. Brig.1 the enemy limits his efforts to artillery and reconnaissance patrol activities. (Annex 1025)

On the other hand in the area southeast of Fom Tatahouine the enemy continues his strong reconnaissance thrusts. Our reconnaissance group has to withdraw fighting/^{until evening} from a superior enemy forces to the pass positions in the line 20 km east - 4 km northeast of Fom Tatahouine. Fresh reconnaissance patrols are still on the enemy side of this line and are keeping contact with him.

(Annex 1026)

Several days ago the army had to decide (see conference of O.B. with Gen.Messe on 2 Feb.) to give up delaying ~~resistance~~ defense of the mountain crossings at Fom Tatahouine because of a lack of troops. Since the reconnaissance group is adequate for the protection of the Fom Tatahouine area at present, Gen. Roncaglia receives the order to bring up his forces still in the Fom Tatahouine area (4 motorized Sahara companies) beginning in the forenoon of 11 Feb. and put them in line in the outpost area of his sector for reconnaissance and ~~xxx~~ security purposes. (Annex 1027)

concerning
On the basis of yesterday's conference ~~with regard to~~ the Gafsa undertaking D.A.K. Hqs. is entrusted with its preparation and execution. (Annex 1028) The army will plan for a concentrated attack with a north group (main body of the 21.Pz.Div.) from the northeast or the east and with a south group (forces of the D.I.Panzerarmee) from the south or the southwest against the Gafsa area. Whether a continuation of the operation in the direction of Tebessa comes into the question or whether the army must content itself with holding the ~~xxxx~~ terrain gained will be determined according to the development of the situation.

D.A.K.Hqs. receives the order to initiate at once the necessary reconnaissances. Because the Pz. A.O.K 5 had to postpone the undertaking against Sidi ~~by~~ Zid on account of the bad conditions of the terrain resulting from the rainy weather the time for the beginning of the attack is not yet certain. X-Day will be ordered by the army. The forces for the operation will be brought up at the proper time.

The army decides to release them as late as possible, in the evening of 11 Feb. at the earliest, and to move them to assembly area. As the D.A.K. Hqs had to be released immediately for the preparation of the new mission the 15 Pz.Div. is entrusted on 10 Feb. with the command of the rearguard engagements in the area eastward of Mareth and is placed under the direct control of the army. The 164. le.Afr.Div. is also detached from the command of the D.A.K. and is placed under the orders of the XXI.A.K. at 20800 hours 10 Feb.

In the afternoon a discussion takes place at the army C.P. with a representative? deputy of O.K.H./Organization Section concerning the replenishment of the German units of the D.I.Panzerarmee. (Annex 1029) It is decided that a few units of the armored and light divisions will have their T.C. and T.E. modified, partly because of experience gained in Africa, partly because of the introduction of stronger and more modern weapons. The ~~German~~ O.K.H. will have all deficient

materiel and weapons brought to Italy. Then it will depend on the water transportation whether replacements of materiel can be brought over to Africa ~~ixxxx~~ shortly and in time.

(Situation map and reports see Annex 1030)

Air situation:

Bad weather continues to prevent any commitment of air force on both sides.

Estimate of the situation and intention:

Enemy pressure against the rearguard positions in the area southeast of Ben Gardahe has slackened. This is due probably to bad weather principally. As rain still continues and the almost entire region on both sides of the border is impassable now as before, the army expects no strong enemy pressure on 11 Feb.

The army intends to hold the present rearguard positions on 11 Feb. also.

Gen. Warlimont, Deputy Chief of the O.K.W./W.F.St., arrives at the army and in the afternoon inspects a few sectors of the Mareth position. The knowledge the O.B. gained through personal reconnaissance of all the sectors of the Mareth ~~xxxxxxx~~ ^{front} including those of the western and northwestern fronts enables him to give Gen. Warlimont, by means of the map, a comprehensive presentation of the Mareth position and of the estimate inferred from it ~~xxxx~~ to be submitted at the Führer's Hqs. Next the O.B. emphasizes the fact that the improved Mareth position -like all the former positions of the army in Egypt and Lybia (with the exception of the Alamein position)- can be enveloped by comparatively strong enemy forces from the south or the west. These possibilities are supported by our own reconnaissances and the studies of French generals in 1938, studies which are in our possession. It can be accepted ~~xxxx~~ almost without a doubt that the British are intending a similar operation, whether as main effort or secondary operation.

In addition to the occupation of the main front located between Dj.Csour and the coast, forces must also be employed for the direct protection of the deep northwest flank and for the blocking of the ^{especially} important passes of Kreddache and Ksar el Hallouf leading from east ~~and~~ to west over the mountain and now located in the extension of the right flank. In addition to that, today's conditions force the army to hold in readiness ^{at least} sufficient forces against a possible threat of its rear from the Gafsa area, especially if, as intended, the new boundary to the 5.Pz.A.O.K. becomes effective.

In broad lines the ^{planned} distribution of forces is shown on the map. The following particulars in the various frontal sectors are to be noticed:

a. Main front: The French line of concrete emplacements forms the outline of the front. The concrete emplacements themselves are in no way adequate for modern requirements, not to mention the fact that after the armistice they were completely disarmed. They can provide very worthwhile protection from enemy fire but cannot be used as gun positions for active fighting. The real defense must be provided by field positions located between the individual emplacements.

The line of French fortifications, which had to be taken over "as was" purely because of lack of time and labor forces is altogether unsatisfactory from the artillery standpoint. Artillery observation facilities from the main defensive area of the 3 center division sectors are very limited because of the commanding hills situated a few kilometers in ~~the~~ front of the main line of resistance; these hills are decidedly an asset to the enemy occupying them. The logical sequence therefore is the necessity to occupy ^{with strong forces} the these hills located in front of ~~the~~ position proper and hold them as long as ever possible as advance positions. This will ~~be~~ become the mission of elements of the position divisions and also of the main body of the mobile

German units employed as rearguards and which later will form the general reserve of the army behind the individual sectors of the entire front.

Artillery support of the fight for the advance positions from the defensive main/area ~~is from the point of view of range not possible for Elements~~ the mass of the Italian artillery especially. ~~Units~~ of the artillery there-committed with fore will be ~~xxx~~ in the frame work of the advanced positions. Security of the positions against mechanized attacks will be partial only. Where it is not available antitank ditches will be constructed and a corresponding increase in the number of mines to be laid will take place. The enemy, who knows the situation and the conditions of the Mareth position proper to its smallest detail, will attack ^{probably} with a strong north flank in the ^{weakest} sector ^{from a terrain} north of the high road, so that after the north sector has been eliminated the considerably stronger south sector can be rolled up from the north. Such an attack, executed by the enemy with adequate forces, will result in a removal of the advanced positions despite our organization for defense and the ^{probably} heavy sacrifices the enemy will be called upon to make.

The main position itself ^{is,} in the Pistoia sector and in the southern half of the Spezia sector, an absolute mountain front and altogether secure against mechanized attacks. A broad depression, to be flanked on both sides and protected by antitank ditches runs through the center of the sector of the division Spezia. The commitment of strong enemy armored forces against it would be possible. The left flank of the Div. Spezia, on the other hand, is located on commanding heights safe from panzer attacks. The adjoining sectors of the 90.le.Afr.Div., Div. Trieste and Div. Jungfaschisten (XX.A.K.) form undoubtedly the weakest part of the entire front from the point of view of terrain. Their defense of these sectors against massed enemy commitment would be especially difficult should the advanced positions of the 90.le. Afr.Div. and Div. Trieste be captured by the enemy. The ~~safety~~ security of

stand point

of these sectors against mechanized attacks is, in the long run, problematic, as the tank obstacles, with the exception of mines, formed by the steep slopes of a wadi can be overcome^{by} the use of sufficient forces.

Neither is the northernmost divisional sector (Div. Jungfasohisten) as strong as it appears on the map. The salt lakes marked on it do not all exist and do not at all preclude the ~~an~~ commitment of strong armored forces.

To sum up, after the advanced positions have been captured, the terrain features indicate that the main effort of an enemy attack will be against the sector of the XX.A.K. and probably on both sides of the high road. The width of the sectors, the commitment of the German 90.1e.Afr.Div. at the probable focal point, the artillery disposition, the laying of mines, and finally the position of readiness of the 15.Pz.Div. have been planned making allowances for these reflections.

A total of about 65 German and 340 Ital.guns form the artillery defense of this main front. A gain of about 10 - 14 days for the improvement and mining of the main position would be a decisive factor. It seems possible to accomplish this. The supply of mines has been very satisfactory so that strong mine obstacles will be available. The bringing up of artillery ammunition is insufficient. On the basis of the experiences of the defensive fighting of Alamein the requisitions for this department must be: 3 ammunition quotas in the fire position dumps, 3 additional in readiness in ammunition depots in the rear and the ammunition stock held to 3 quotas. The success of the defense depends on these requisitions being met. In addition the accelerated replenishment in personnel and matériel of German units must be emphasized. The fighting strength of the ~~only~~ various regiments of the 90.1e.Afr.Div. for instance has an average of 350 men. Their antitank gun equipment is defective.

e

If these requirements are filled in time before the launching of the decisive attack of the British Eighth Army there will be an assurance that these positions will be held against the strongest enemy attacks also in view of the doubtless available ~~extremely~~ strength of the main front. The combat value of the almost totally ~~inexperienced~~ ^{untried} Italian units is the great question. In this connection experience has unfortunately ~~shown~~ ^{any} shown that /optimism is uncalled for.

b. Extention of the main front to the south:

The 164.1e.Afr.Div. will be put in line for the blocking of the important East-West passes Kreddache and Ksar el Hallouf. Despite its weak combat value -by way of artillery it has for instance only a light battery- the division will be able to accomplish its mission against an enemy attack from the east. An enemy encirclement from the west is the main danger g threatening this division. Should such an envelopment seem in the making, the/southernmost Kampfgruppe of the division (see map) which at present forms a certain ~~link~~ contact with the security forces at Foun Tatahouine, will be pulled out and committed for the reinforcement of the present weak western security detachments, while elements will continue to ~~block~~ ^{block} the road leading from the south to Kreddach. If ~~not~~ necessary, that is in case of superior enemy pressure from the west, the 164.1e.Afr.Div. will withdraw to the north and then, ^{ad} /joining the south flank of the Div.Pistoia, will protect the area south of Matnata with front to the southwest, and this way close the existing gap between Korpsgruppe Ronoaglia and the main front. To commit the division in such a way from the beginning would mean ceding to the enemy without a fight the Medanine -Bir Sultane communication which under certain circumstances is important to him. This is unbearable, especially as the passes cannot be blasted so permanently that they cannot be made usable again in a future not too distant.

In view of the lack of forces the M.A.O.K. had to decide to abandon a ~~delaying operations~~ strong defense of the fairly difficult mountain crossings at Fom Tatahouine and to leave there only weak, mobile security and reconnaissance forces which will under strong enemy pressure withdraw to the north after suitable mining and blocking. The German-Ital. reconnaissance group in line in the south among others is intended for commitment in the Bir Sultane ~~xxx~~ region. The other Italian elements will join Korpsgruppe Roncaglia.

by a defense of the Kreddache and Ksar el Hallouf passes, It appears all the more important to constrain the enemy, in case he intends an envelopment west of Djebel Csour as it is supposed, to execute a time consuming detour far to the south over Fom Tatahouine.

c. Northwestern front:

^{enemy} ^{ing}
By an envelopment movement directed against the deep northwest flank of the Mareth position, the army, from the point of view of forces, will not be in a position to launch an attack west of Djebel Csour, but here also will have to limit itself to resistance. The terrain both sides of the Djebel Melab is appropriate for it. The Italian forces, at present in line there under General Roncaglia in the strength of 4 - 5 battalions with a few ^{for} batteries are not in the remotest way sufficient ~~of~~ a decisive defense in view of the extensive area to be covered and despite all the advantageous terrain features. A reinforcement of this front, necessary under certain circumstances, can take place only at the cost of reserves assembled in readiness behind the main front or intended against a threat from the Gafsa direction. If, by denuding this front of reserves, all available motorized forces (15. Pz.Div. with Pz.Gren.Rgtt. Africa, Lw.Jg.Brig.1, reinforced 7.Bers.Rgt. (mot.) reconnaissance group) are put in line ⁱⁿ ~~at~~ the Roncaglia sector, it seems possible to avoid here a breakthrough of enemy forces estimated in the strength of a motorized division reinforced with 2 or 1 Panzer Brigade.

d. Westfront

Under the supposition that the new army boundary becomes effective this front directed against Gafsa ~~it~~ will play a decisive role, under certain circumstances, in a general estimate of the Mareth position. It must be taken into consideration that, with conditions as they are today, ~~the~~ the forces employed there for security purposes would not in the long run be able to withstand a ^{contigent} ~~possible~~ enemy attack on the coast. One must not lose sight of the possibility that the mass of the available reserves would have to be committed here and that the other fronts would thereby be weakened.

Concluding opinion :

To ^{temp} complete holding the Mareth position in its entirety presents, ~~under today's conditions~~ considering the state of the troops today, a problem that the Germ.-Ital. Panzerarmee cannot solve, if the enemy, acting ^{strategic} correctly from an ~~operational~~ point of view, attacks simultaneously frontally from the east, encircling west of the Djebel Csour and attacking from the Gafsa area in the direction of the coast. On the other hand, if the rear ^{absolutely necessary} of the army is free without the mass of the ~~mobile~~ reserves tied down there from the beginning then a decisive defensive success against the British Eighth Army would seem possible, provided the Ital. divisions proved themselves able to cope with an ~~enemy~~ ^{large scale} attack. Whether this would be the case despite all previous experiences can only be decided by ^{the} serious eventuality.

But there can be no argument about the necessity to attempt everything to still carry out successfully the planned attack against Gafsa ~~in~~ and protect the rear of the D.I. Panzerarmee.

This estimate is also given in writing to Gen. Warlimont. Copies will be sent to O.B.S., F.M. Kesselring and the O.B. of the 5. Pz. A. O. K.

(Annex 1031)

2. morning and noon report to O.K.H. (Annex 1032)

11 February 1943

1. Sequence of events:

Only desultory artillery harassing fire and reconnaissance patrol activity on the part of the enemy because of continuous rainy weather. The forces that he had pushed forward over the boundary to the west in the area southeast of Ben Gardane in the previous days have been again withdrawn to the area east of the border to escape from the danger of being cut off. (Annex 1033).

Vigorous reconnaissance patrol activity continues on both sides in the area south and southeast of Fom Tatahouine. The preparations for the blowing up of the pass roads are completed; the mining of the area south of Fom Tatahouine has begun. (Annex ~~103~~ 1034)

The 4 motorized Sahara companies of Korpsgruppe Roncaglia heretofore employed for the direct protection of the mountain ~~pa~~ crossings of Fom Tatahouine have fallen back to Matmata in compliance with orders. The 5.Pz.A.O.K. reports that the undertaking against Sidi bu Zid will probably begin only on 14 February. This will put off the operation against Gafsa until ^{the morning of} 16 Feb. at the earliest, provided the weather conditions do not ~~cause~~ ^{ceding} further postponement of a ~~previous~~ attack of the 21.Pz.Div. in another place. The intended forces will therefore not start to march on 12 Feb. (Annex 1035)

In the forenoon the O.B. inspects with Gen. Warlimont the Schott position north of Gabès, the improvement of which is carried out at present by Ital. forces on order of Comando Supremo. The O.B. calls attention to the advantages this position has over the Mareth position which with its inherent drawbacks (front width, danger of envelopment from the west, rear threat from Gafsa) never was considered by the army as the final line of defense. According to the O.B.'s opinion the Schott position, with freshly equipped German and Ital. units, could be held under any circumstances, if the main effort of improvement were placed on this position from the beginning. Instead Comando

Supremo, without even consulting F.M. Rommel, from the first ordered the Mareth line to be the final line of defense and initiated the improvement there. (Annex 1036)

(Situation map and reports see Annex 1037)

Air situation:

Weak on 11 Feb. on account of the weather.

Estimate of the situation and plans

Air reconnaissance discloses no change in the picture presented by the enemy before the front. The impression is that there will be no enemy attack on 12 Feb. The army rearguards will therefore hold their present positions on 12 Feb.

On the basis of a change in the enemy picture in the Gafsa-Sbeitla area (it must be assumed that the American army has withdrawn the mass of its forces to the Sbeitla-Tabessa area) and the resulting ~~with~~ modifications in our expectations of an attack/on 8 Feb., FM. Rommel ~~receives~~ toward noon ~~from~~ from Comando Supremo a new order for the anticipated attack operation.

"The Kampfgruppe under the command of F.M. Rommel will ~~immediately~~ participate in the undertaking of the 5.Pz.A.O.K. against Sidi bu Zid and the enveloping attack and will immediately push on Gafsa to annihilate the enemy forces there. After the Gafsa basin is safe the attack will continue on Tozeur and the line Metlauoi - Tozeur will be covered toward the west.

The 5.Pz.A.O.K. makes a mobile combat group available for this operation. It remains important for the D.I. Panzer army that the rear guard engagements against the British Eighth Army be continued as actively as possible for a long time. Therefore the forces provided for the Gafsa operation ~~will~~ will ~~be~~ have to be of adequate strength. ?

The development of the tactical situation will decide the continuation of the operation out of the Gafsa area. Supplies will be plentiful enough in that area to permit further operations. The first thing to be

done at the conclusion of the fighting will be to put non-mobile forces in line to protect the gained position, release the mobile forces from the front and constitute mobile reserves behind the Mareth line as well as behind the left flank of the 5.Pz.A.O.K." (Annex 1038)

The army is of the opinion that the forces for this mission have been meted out too sparingly by Comando Supremo. It is expected ^{of} ~~that~~ the active D.I.Panzer army that it continues the/rear guard fights against the British ~~with~~ Eighth Army, and moreover, reinforced only by a mobile Kampfgruppe of the Fifth Army, that it will and make secure the Gafsa Tozeur area. In addition to that, ground reconnaissances initiated by the army in the last few days have disclosed that ~~the enemy resistance~~ enemy resistance in the Gafsa area ~~is much stronger than~~ far stronger than Comando Supremo has assumed must be expected.

The army submits ~~report~~ to Comando Supremo a report to that effect and requires that additional forces of Pz.A.O.K.5 be made available for the mission ordered. (Annex 1039)

On the basis of the new mission given to the army, i.e. to capture the Gafsa - Metlauoi - Tozeur area and hold it, the estimate of the army situation given yesterday to Gen.Warlimont (Annex 1031) must be complemented as follows:

" The new mission signifies an expansion of the defensive front of the army to about 100 km, partly in open terrain. To hold this new area with the Div.Centauro and the two march battalions in prospect against a strong enemy attack would hardly be possible. It is to be emphasized that a replenishment of the German divisions by the two mentioned march battalions is urgently required rather than give these two battalions, whose combat value is low, an independent mission to ^{perform.} It can already be foreseen that at least strong elements of the provided attack troops will remain tied in ~~the~~ the area

and will therefore not be available as urgently needed reserves behind the Mareth front proper or in its deep northwest flank.

Thereby the mission entrusted to the D.I. Panzerarmee, an unconditional holding of the Mareth ~~pos~~ position, which I have already described as a problem not to be solved under certain conditions, becomes even more difficult. In addition it can be foreseen already that a worthwhile increase in the combat value of the German units and perhaps also an adequate supply of artillery ammunition will not be attained in time. I reiterate that these two points form however the real prerequisites for a decisive holding of the Mareth position (Annex 1070)

2. Morning and noon report to O.K.H. (Annex 1040)

12 February 1943

1. Sequence of events:

There is no important action in the area of our rearguards at the border because of heavy sandstorms. (Annex 1041)

Vigorous reconnaissance patrol activity continues/south and southeast on both sides of Foum Tatahouine. (Annex 1043)

Pz.A.O.K.5. fixes the beginning of the attack on Sidi bu Zid for the 14 February. This will enable the 21.Pz.Div. to be available on the evening of 15 Feb. for the Gafsa undertaking, and that operation can begin on the same evening or early 16 Feb. Therefore the army begins to pull out ~~from the~~ that are rear guard units the forces intended for the operation/still in line with the

They are the following ones:

Pz.Gren.Rgt.Afrika,
2 battalions, Lw.Jg.Brig.1,
A.A.33,
1 armored battalion and 1 antitank company of the 15.Pz.Div.,
1 battalion of the army artillery

The movements for the concentration of these forces in the area north-

west of Gabès on both sides of the Gabès-Gafsa road will begin ~~with~~ at night fall. (Annex 1043)

In answer to the army report of yesterday the Comando Supremo announces that the main body of the 21.Pz.Div. and additional of A.O.K.5 will take part in the Gafsa operation.

Comando Supremo agains calls attention to the fact that the attack on Tozeur is necessary to protect the ~~the~~ deep flank and rear of the Mareth position. Until the arrival of the 2 march battalions which are to be flown to Tunis by 20 Feb. the D.I.Panzerarmee will take over the protection of the Tozeur - Metlauoi - Gafsa area with its own forces. (Annex 1044)

Upon order of Comando Supremo the new boundary to the 5.Pz.Army became effective at 0000 hours 12 Feb. It runs as follows: Hir el Kmunzi (20 km northeast of Sfax) - Mezzouna - Meich - Sened (locality for D.I.Pz. Armeé) - point 405 (16 km north of Gafsa) - river crossing 2 km south of Hir Barouka - course of the river to the northwest. (Annex 1045)

The D.I.Panzerarmee has taken over the new sector and consequently the control of the Div.Centauro. The army now has 2 fronts; one the south-east front facing the British Eighth Army and the second the west front facing mostly American forces.

(Situation map and reports see Annex 1046)

Air situation:

No change since yesterday.

Estimate of the situation and intentions:

With an amelioration in the weather renewed enemy activity against our rear guard positions can be expected. The main effort is still thought to be out of the area northwest of el Assa. This supposition is confirmed by air reconnaissance which discloses a reinforcement of enemy forces in the el Assa area.

As a result of the withdrawal of strong forces out of the rear guard units and the shifting of forces tied up with it the army must give up the present rear guard positions on the border and in the night of 12/13 Feb. will withdraw its forces ~~to~~ ^{on} a shortened front at first to a ~~ring~~ ^{perimeter defense} (X) position around Ben Gardane

2. Morning and noon report to O.K.H. (Annex 1047)

Fighting in the outpost area of the Mareth position

13 February - 20 February 1943

1. Sequence of events:

a. Southeast front:

The withdrawal of the rear guards to the ~~ring position~~ ^{perimeter defense line} Ben Gardane took place during the night of 12/13 systematically and without enemy pressure. At dawn the 15.Pz.Div. is ready for defense in the new area.

And now that Tripolitanian-Tunisian border positions, held for 14 days by German troops alone, have been abandoned, the fight in Lybia has come to an end.

The enemy feels forward at first with reconnaissance patrols and until evening uses only reconnaissance forces. Independent/^{weak} enemy thrusts are repulsed by the 15.Pz.Div. (Annex 1048)

On the other hand in the area southeast and south of Fom Tatahouine the enemy continues his reconnaissance activity against the reconnaissance group (composed only of the A.A.3 and A.A. Nizza after the withdrawal of the A.A.33) and advances with a strong combat force in the area east of Fom Tatahouine. A counterattack of our reconnaissance group repulses enemy forces advancing from the Dehibat ~~direction~~ against the area south-

southwest of Fom Tatahouine. Today for the first time the enemy feels forward over the line Fom Tatahouine - Ben Gardane to the northwest against the deep flank of the 15.Pz.Div. (Annex 1049)

b. Westfront:

Assembling movements for the Gafsa operation take place according to plans.

Ground reconnaissance today discloses anew increase of enemy reconnaissance patrol activity against our security detachments at el Guettar and Maknassi. Tozeur and the area north thereof are said to be only sparsely occupied; on the other hand the enemy has reinforced his security detachments at Matlauci. According to agents reports the enemy is provisioning Gafsa and builds up reinforcements.

On the basis of this enemy picture the army suggests to the 5.Pz.Arme and to Comando Supremo that, in addition to the 21.Pz.Div., other forces be freed for the Gafsa undertaking, even if necessary the 10.Pz.Div. which had already been considered previously. (Annex 1050)

Gen.von Arnim thereupon states that neither the 10.Pz.Div. nor even elements of it can be made available, being indispensable in the north sector as the only available mobile general reserves. (Annex ~~1050~~ 1051) there is no answer from Comando Supremo as yet.

Situation map and reports Annex 1052)

Air situation:

Since the weather has improved, our air activity and that of the enemy is more vigorous than on the previous days.

Estimate of the situation and intentions:

a. Southeast front:

The extremely vigorous reconnaissance patrol activity against the line Fom Tatahouine as well as a reinforcement of enemy forces around and north-

from the south
west of el Assa are an indication that the enemy attempt to envelop/the
present rearguard positions southeast and east of Ben Gardane with strong
forces can be expected shortly.

Since the withdrawal of the Kampfgruppe D.A.K. left the army without
any mobile reserves to resist such an envelopment^{ing} movement, it will during
the night of 13/14 Feb. take its rear guards to positions about 13 km west of
Ben Gardane more favorable from the point of view of terrain. The new line of
resistance will run at dawn from Fom Tatahouine - Dirchou - 13 km west of
Ben Gardane. Strong security detachments will be left in the area heretofore
occupied with the mission to resist enemy pressure until it becomes too strong
and then withdraw to the main position.

b. West front:

The reports at hand concerning the arrival of enemy reinforcements,
supplies, and the increase of activity among his ~~security~~ reconnaissance
troops in the Gafsa can be estimated as attack preparations. It is possible
that the enemy will launch his attack -presumably over el Guettar along the
road to Gafsa- before the time we have set for our own. D.A.K.Hqs. receives
the order to take measures for a timely interception of a premature enemy
drive from the el Guettar area and to destroy the attacking forces in a
counterattack; D.A.K. Hqs. will retain at the same time its former mission
(preparation for the Gafsa undertaking). (Attack 1053)

2. Morning and moon report to O.K.H. (Annex 1054)

14 February 1943

1. Sequence of events:

a. Southeast front: The withdrawal of the main body of the 15.Pz.Div. to
the new rear guard position 13 km west of Ben Gardane takes place according
to plans and is completed by dawn. (Annex 1055)

The security detachments which have been left disposed in width about 15 km south, southeast and east of Ben Gardane have repulsed all the ~~enemy~~ thrusts of hostile reconnaissance forces during the entire day. The enemy is apparently not yet aware that we have abandoned Ben Gardane.

(Annex 1056)

The pressure of superior enemy/^{reconnaissance} forces in the area southeast and east of Fom Tatahouine continues. Our reconnaissance patrols reinforced by anti-tank guns and roving guns, repeatedly prevent/^{the enemy,} through skilfull counterattacks and flanking thrusts, to get established in the Fom Tatahouine area. ^{All} The important mountain ~~xxxxxxx~~ ^{passes} are still ~~in~~ German hands by evening. The preparations for blowing/^{up} the passes are everywhere completed and some blasting has been done already. All the roads leading from north, east and south to Fom Tatahouine have been mined ^{with} in a 15 km radius. (Annex 1057)

b. West front:

With the exception of activities on the part of reconnaissance patrols before the front of the Div. Centauro the day passes without special occurrence.

(Annex 1058)

The concentration of the units intended for the Gafsa undertaking which has received the name "Morganluft" [morning breeze] from the army, continues as planned and will probably be completed by the evening of Feb. 15. The attack group of the D.A.K. has been reinforced by a panzer battalion and an artillery battalion of the Ital. Panzer Div. Centauro. Moreover it is provided that the Div. Centauro, which has been instructed to cooperate in the closest way with D.A.K., will follow immediately after the Gafsa area has been gained and will be employed to cover the captured area. This will free the attack group which, according to the ~~xxx~~ situation and decisions will be available for the further conduct of operations or for employment on the Marath front. (Annex 1059)

The Tunis Air Force Corps has been informed of the wishes of the army

as to support for the operation "Morgenluft" (Annex 1060)

The O.B. gives Gen. Messe particulars concerning the attack operation of the 5. Pz. Army ^{early} launched/this morning and the intended execution of the operation "Morgenluft" as was set down in yesterday's conference between the O.B., Gen. Ziegler (and) the commander of the attack group of the 5. Pz. Armee.

The O.B. suggests then to Gen. Messe that during his absence in the western operation area Gen. Messe should take over the high command over the Mareth front. Gen. Messe first wants permission from Comando Supremo. Thereupon the O.B. gives up his intention and decides to retain the high command over the Mareth front.

Situation map and reports see Annex 1061)

Air situation:

The main effort of the best part of our ~~air~~ air force today is the support of the attack of the 5. Pz. Armee.

Hostile air activity is comparatively weak.

Supply situation of the German troops:

It is assured in the present quiet tactical situation. It was possible to replenish the troops to an average of 2.5 V.S. [consumption per 100 km] of gas. and 1,2 ammunition issue (including the stocks in ~~the~~ dumps in the immediate vicinity)

The 2 special operations in which important elements of the 3 German panzer divs. are participating are increasing the demand. From the point of view of ammunition the operation Morgenluft is provided for; the fuel situation is ^{such that} ~~so~~ available gas is just sufficient for the execution of the operation, leaving the troops immobilized. Therefore O.B. Sdd is requested to issue the iron gas reserve of the two armies stored in Tunis. (Annex 1062)

Estimate of the situation and plans

a. Southeast front: Air reconnaissance disclosed no important change in the

~~the~~ enemy picture before the southeast front. When the ground on both sides of the border is dry and most of it is passable the army expects on 15 Feb. increased enemy pressure against our rearguard positions west of Ben Gardane and a continuation of the enemy encircling attempts between Fom Tatahouine and Ben Gardane.

The army intends to hold the rearguard positions 13 km west of Ben Gardane.

b. West front: In the Gafsa area ground and air reconnaissances confirm the previous enemy picture before the front.

The army will have completed the concentration for the operation Morgenluft by the evening of 15 Feb. According to the development of the situation in the 21.Pz.Div. the onset of the attack will not be before 16 Feb. at its earliest.

2. Morning and noon report to O.K.H. (Annex 1063)

15 February 1943

1. Sequence of events

a. Southeast front:

Ben Gardane

Hostile reconnaissance forces, reinforced by panzers, attack/in the afternoon of 15 Feb. from the south and gradually push back our security detachments still in position south and east of the town. The enemy takes Ben Gardane at 1320 hours and pursues closely with ~~the~~ armored forces up to the rearguard positions of the 15.Pz.Div. 13 km west of Ben Gardane. Driving in a wide encircling movement from the south he attempts to ~~en~~ envelop the right flank of the position and crush it. Through the ^{defensive} concentrated/fire of the entire artillery and a counterattack of our panzers the attack is repulsed and several enemy tanks are shot down. (Annex 1064)

The strong enemy pressure on the reconnaissance group in the Fom

Tatahouine area and north thereof continues. All attempts of enemy units, consisting of 2 reconnaissance battalions, to push back our security detachments standing at the mountain entrances east and southeast of Fom Tatahouine are in vain. (Annex 1065)

Strong reconnaissance troops feel forward several times over the line Fom Tatahouine - Kirchou to the west. So as to avoid at all cost a thrust on Medenine, the security detachments of the 164. Le. Afr. Div. in line south of Medenine are taken back to the immediate Medenine area and are reinforced. (Annex 1066)

In the Mareth main position the commitment of the units and the improvement of the position are practically completed. But the major works strengthening for the ~~improvement~~ of the position are far from finished.

Out of a plan calling for a total of 360 000 mines (240 000 antitank mines and 120 000 antipersonnel mines) only about 33 000 or 9% have been laid (including 13 000 antipersonnel or 11% and 20 000 antitank mines or 8,5%) This can be traced back directly to lack of mine matériel and trained personnel. The construction of tank traps in the main position which has total length of 30 km is making only slow progress. Despite several weeks of work only 16 km or 53% are completed. 6 km or 20 % are being worked on, and 8 km or 27% have not yet been touched.

The positions are in parts very thinly occupied, especially in the German sectors, as heretofore the units have hardly been replenished ~~to their full strength~~ in the way of personnel. (Annex 1067)

b. West front

The security detachments of the Pz. Div. Dentauro report in the afternoon that the enemy positions located before their front have been apparently evacuated. An immediate reconnaissance discloses that the enemy, probably under the impression of the successful attack at Sidi bu Zid, has given up the area

around Gafsa during the night of 14/15 Feb. That same evening, elements of the attack group D.A.K. and of the Div. Centauro occupy the locality and drive strong reconnaissance forces against Metlauoi - Tozeur and in the direction of Feriana.

(Situation map and reports see Annex 1068)

Air situation:

Our Jabos repeatedly raid the enemy in the area east of Fom Tatahouine with good results. The main effort of our air force is again the support of the attack of the 5.Pz.Armeé west of the Faid pass.

Enemy air activity is more vigorous than on the previous day.

Supply situation of the German troops

Upon request of the army (Annex 1062) O.B.Std release 300 cubic meters of fuel gas from the Tunis reserve for the operation Morgenluft. According to a report from Rome additional supplies of gas are on their way by sea. Herewith the ~~planned~~ planned operations are covered also within ~~the~~ a limited scope from the point of view of fuel. The 21.Pz.Div. has at its disposal 3 V.S., the von Liebenstein group over 3,5 V.A. In addition the army has ~~the~~ 1,5 ~~in~~ V.S. in reserve. These quantities will permit the units, after reaching their assembly area, to carry out a thrust of 100 - 150 km and, if the situation requires it, to fall back to their point of departure. (Annex 1069)

Tank situation:

a. German: 54 tanks III and IV

b. Italian: 25 tanks M

Estimate of the situation and plans:

After the mission of the D.I. Panzerarmee had been added to on the basis of the new boundary to the 5.Pz.Armeé since 12 Feb. as well as on the basis of the orders of Comando Supremo from 11 and 12 Feb., the O.B. ~~xxxxx~~ submits to the Comando Supremo a extensive estimate of the situation. (Annex 1070)

a. ^{east} South front:

Tactical air reconnaissance disclosed a strong enemy unit (over 1 000 vehicles, including numerous tanks) in the area just southeast of Ben Gardane.

Another enemy group, also with many tanks (about 500 vehicles) reached the (50 km south of Ben Gardane) Morra area/from the southeast in the afternoon. While this south group is presumably the 4.1e.Pz.Brigrade of the 7.Pz.Div. which follows, the north group is doubtless the 44.British Div. reinforced by 1 -2Pz.Brigrades.

(Annex 1071)

The enemy has apparently surmounted the terrain difficulties in the border area and is deploying westward with strong units.

The position of the 15.Pz.Div. remaining alone as rear guard west of Ben Gardane (~~with negligible elements~~) has become untenable in view of the picture of strong enemy superiority and the threatening envelopment from the south. The 15.Pz. Div. has therefore received the order to withdraw and to occupy the nearest rear guard position on the high ground just west of Medenine. The comparatively long distance between the two points is through very flat ^{Country} ~~ground~~ between Medenine and Ben Gardane and very passable. Any intermediate position would be easily surrounded by the enemy. (Annex 1073)

In connection with the abandonment of the rear guard positions at the border and at Ben Gardane Comando Supremo again stresses the importance of delaying the enemy advance as long as possible, and denounces at the same time the giving up of positions without urgent grounds. In his ~~answer~~ reply to the Comando Shpremo the O.B. vehemently denies the imputation, since he had previously repeatedly warned that a withdrawal of important elements of the rearguards would forcibly result in an accelerated enemy pursuit. The withdrawal of the troops was necessary because strong enemy forces stood not only before the front but already in the deep flank of the ^{area} ~~area~~ guards and there existed the danger of being enveloped and cut off. (Annex 1072)

Strategic air reconnaissance toward Tripolis and eastward discloses numerous ships, a total of about 20 000 registered tons, lying at anchor in front of the port, and vigorous east-west traffic on the Misurata-Tripolis road. (Annex 1071)

b. West front:

The army decides to occupy the Gafsa area and to launch a reconnaissance unit in the direction of Feriana to regain the lost contact with the enemy. Div. Centauro has received the order to advance its forces, heretofore committed ~~in~~ against el Guettar, to the Gafsa area and ~~establish communication~~ put them in line on the ~~controlling~~ ^{dominating} heights east and west of the town in close liaison with D.A.K. At first D.A.K. will push forward only a mobile combat group and reconnaissance forces to the Gafsa area and will reconnoiter toward ^{Feriana} and Metaoui-Tozeur. (Annex 1074)

The mass of the forces assembled for the intended attack operation will be used at first according to the development of the situation.

~~OPERATION MORGENLUFT~~ This is substantially the winding up of Operation Morgenluft. The forces which, in compliance with today's order of Comando Supremo, were to be detached ^{from?} for the 5.Pz.Arme (mobile elements of the 21.Pz.Div. and Motorcycle Bn.10 of the 10.Pz.Div.) were not committed as they are still held in the area west of Faid pass as a result of spreading of the successful operation of the 5/Pz.Arme. (Annex 1075)

2. Morning and noon report to O.K.H. (Annex 1076)

16 February 1943

1. Sequence of events

a. South front: The anticipated withdrawal of the 15.Pz.Div. to the new rear guard position just west of Medenine ~~took~~ ^{took} place during the night of 15/16 Feb. according to plan and without enemy pressure. At 0900, ^{hour} the division is in the

new area, ready for defense. Its power of resistance has been increased by the bringing forward of an Italian artillery battalion and heavy German flak artillery from the advanced Mareth position.

The enemy, effectively delayed by numerous mines, follows only hesitantly along the Ben Gardane - Medenine road on 16 Feb. In the evening loose contact is established with the advanced elements in the area about 15 km east or southeast of Medenine. (Annex 1077)

The reconnaissance group repulses anew numerous enemy assaults of strong troops ~~positioned~~ from the east or southeast against the high ground around Foun Tatahouine. (Annex 1078)

b. West front:

During the night the north edge of Gafsa was occupied by Pz.Gren. Rgt. Afrika on both sides of the road leading to Feriana, and by Div. Centauro on the heights east and west of the town. (Annex 1079)

At dawn the A.A. 33 reconnoiters energetically in the direction of Feriana, and after driving back enemy rear guards, pushes forward as far as Madjene bel Abbes (50 km northwest of Gafsa). After violent fighting the locality was captured, and a following enemy counterattack executed with tanks and armored scout cars was repulsed with losses for the enemy. According to the reports submitted until evening 7 armored scout cars have been shot down and a number of prisoners have been brought in. (Annex 1080)

Metlauoi and Tozenn were occupied until the afternoon by weak security troops of D.A.K. without contact with the enemy.

Situation maps and reports, see Annex ~~1080~~ 1081)

Air situation

Our Luftwaffe raided successfully enemy concentrations before the south front and support^{ed} the attack operation of the 5. Pz. Armees with the main effort around Sidi bu Zid.

The enemy air force attacked repeatedly on both fronts with strong forces.

Supply situation of the German troops:

The army is submitting to O.K.W./W.F.St. a list of the gains and losses on personnel, weapons and motor vehicles in the month of January.

Detailed report as follows:

"a. In January the army gained on African ground:

19 tanks
24 scout cars
27 medium antitank guns
12 heavy " "
8 guns
43 armored cars
18 trucks
10 prime mover trucks

The losses during the withdrawal fighting:

6 tanks
0 scout cars
11 medium antitank guns
6 heavy " "
~~31~~
5 guns
31 armored cars
91 trucks
14 prime mover trucks

The following were lost in transit from Italy to Africa:

6 tanks
7 scout cars
17 medium antitank guns
4 heavy " "
4 guns
12 armored cars
4 trucks
0 prime mover trucks

b. The personnel situation of the army has continued to deteriorate.

While there were only 5 gains in January, the army during the same period lost in killed, missing and wounded or sick transported to Europe a total of 2 013 officers, non-com. and men

The shortage in personnel ~~is~~ is higher on 31 Jan. than it was on 31 Dec. the extent of

Therefore/the urgently needed and approved replacements for the month of

January is hardly worth mentioning" (Annex 1082)

According to a communication of Comando Supremo of 15 Feb. no amelioration can be expected shortly, since emphasis must be laid on transportation of supplies which has taken a drop in the last few weeks on account of the bad weather. (Annex 1083)

Estimate of the situation and plans:

a. Southeast front

The morning air reconnaissance at first reported a strong concentration of enemy units before the southeast front and an advance of comparatively strong forces in the direction of Medenine. Toward noon a new air reconnaissance disclosed that after all the picture presented by the enemy before the front had not changed since yesterday and that the heavy enemy movements to the west reported this morning were not correct.

In the meantime however, since the ~~mission~~ order of Comando Supremo "occupation and defense of the Gafsa area" had been carried out, the O.B. had sent back elements of the combat group D.A.K. (Lw.Jg.Brig.1 reinforced by heavy arty and flak artillery) in an eastern direction with instructions to assemble in readiness in the area ~~2~~ 8 km north of Mareth for employment at the Mareth front. The army intended to commit these forces in the advanced position in the sector of the XX A.K. since the main effort of the enemy is expected there at first. The result of the first air reconnaissance gave the O.B. reason to think that the enemy intended a powerful thrust against the Mareth position as a relief for the operation in the Gafsa - Sidi bu Zid area which was turning out badly for him.

The final picture presented by the enemy and known by the army in the evening does not corroborate this assumption.

The army intends to hold the present rear guard positions at Foun Tatahouine and west of Medenine as long as ever possible with the reconnaissance group and the 15.Pz.Div.

b. West front:

The order of Comando Supremo of 11 Feb. to reach and secure the Gafsa - Metlauoi - Tozeur area is carried out by the army. Further decisions as to the conduct of operations will depend at first on the development of the situation, especially where the 5. Pz. Armee is concerned. At dawn therefore the army continued its drive to the north only with comparatively weak ~~forces~~ forces to remain in contact with the enemy and even withdrew a part of its units ~~to the north~~ on account of an apparent threat to the Mareth front.

At 1925^{hours} the Operations section of the Pz.A.O.K.5 gives out information on the situation and reports that our panzer attack against the enemy panzer group west of Sidi bu Zid in the afternoon was not effective because the enemy withdrew at once. (according to an intercepted radio order the enemy has instruction to withdraw) The 5. Pz. Armee therefore in that same night launched the two Panzer divisions to a pursuit on Sbeitla to capture the place if possible without getting into large scale fighting. Therefore the army decides ~~x~~ that same evening, the advance being on an advance on Feriana/^{coordinated} with that of the 5. Pz. Armee. At 1930 hours the D.A.K. receives ^{order} to start marching immediately in the direction of Feriana and to take the town in a coup de main if possible without becoming involved in heavy fighting.

Elements already marching to the Mareth position will be intercepted and again placed under the control of the D.A.K. (Annex 1084)

2. Morning and noon report to O.K.H. (Annex 1085)

17 February 1943

1. Sequence of events.

a. South front: After the enemy had failed in his previous attempts to crush into the high ground positions of the reconnaissance group/^{in the Fom Tatahbaing area} with motorized forces, the enemy infantry attempts to eliminate the positions by surprise at night. The attack is repulsed.

Faced by a renewed enemy attack, launched at dawn with strong artillery support, our combat groups, after violent resistance, had to give up the pass positions east and southeast of the high ground in the late forenoon hours. After carrying out all the prepared demolitions, our rear guards, fighting a delaying action until evening, withdraw to the general line Ksar Mguebla (just west of Fom Tatahouine) - Rhoumerassen. (Annex 1086)

The enemy feels forward against the positions of the 15. Pz. Div. just west of Medenine only with reconnaissance forces, all of which are repulsed by our artillery. (Annex 1087)

b. West front:

During the night the combat group of the D.A.K. assembles in the Madjene bel Abbes area.

In the early morning hours the enemy rear guards covering just north of there were thrown back and at dawn we advanced on Feriana. The enemy offers strong resistance just before the town. Toward noon the Pz. Gren. Rgt. Afrika, reinforced by an armored battalion of the D.A.K. and A.A. 33, succeeds in taking Feriana despite violent enemy resistance, and immediately continuing its drive in capturing also Thelepte and the mountain located west of the town.

The enemy is partly thrown back to the mountain in the direction of Tebessa, and partly blown up and destroyed. According to the reports submitted until evening 100 prisoners had been taken^{and} 12 armored personnel carriers with 7,5 guns, 2 tanks, several antitank guns and numerous motor vehicles destroyed or captured. In addition 4 enemy planes crashed, brought down by ground defenses. In Feriana and Tebessa the enemy had to destroy his supplies and ~~on~~ at the air field 30 machines not ready to take up were demolished. (Annex 1088)

Some comparatively weak forces of ours drive reconnaissances over the line Met²uoï - Tozeur in the direction of the Tunisian-Algerian border

and report no enemy forces. (Annex 1089)

After good initial progress the attack of the 5.Pa.Armee against Sbeitla gains ground before the town only slowly on account of violent enemy resistance. The town is captured toward evening by the 21.Pz.Div., our losses being small. For the screening of the north flank the 10.Pz.Div. carried an assault at noon ~~XXXX~~ out of the area 25 km west of the Faid pass toward the north and established contact with the main line of resistance at Fondouk.

(Annex 1090)

(Situation map and reports see Annex 1091)

Air situation:

Despite very adverse weather our Jabo participate several times successfully in ground fighting. The activity of the enemy air force is limited except for a few raids on the combat group of the D.A.K.

Estimate of the situation and intentions

a. Southeast front:

Though air reconnaissance and agent reports disclose that the mass of enemy units following the Ben Gardane - Medenine road, in view of our comparatively strong recognized position, limit themselves to a concentration in the area half way between Ben Gardane and Medenine, the enemy succeeds with superior infantry forces and artillery in driving our security detachments out of the positions at Fom Tatahouine.

The army expect on 18 Feb. a continuation^{ation} of strong enemy pressure on the south flank and a concentration of enemy units in the Medenine area and a moving into position for an attack against our rearguard positions just west of Medenine.

On 18 Feb. the army intends, when enemy pressure becomes too strong, to have the reconnaissance group withdraw fighting and delaying to the south flank of the 164.1e.Afr.Div. Then the group will reach its final area in the

in ~~the~~ vicinity of Bir Sultane and there, in close cooperation with the 164.le.Afr.Div., cover either the west flank or the rear of the division.

(Annex 1092)

On 18 Feb. the army will have the 15.Pz.Div. hold just west of Medenine the rearguard positions which have been reinforced through the commitment of numerous batteries. (15 German and Italian batteries)

To assure safety against any surprise the army ordered in the morning the 90.le.Afr.Div. to have 1 reinforced battalion from the troops in line in its main defensive area held in readiness so that in case of a possible threat to the advanced position in the sector of the XX.A.K. it can be committed immediately ~~upon~~ ^{ly} upon order of the corps in the advanced positions of the Div. Trieste and Jungfaschisten. (Annex 1093)

b. West front:

During the night of 17 ¹⁵ Feb. instructions of Comando Supremo were received concerning further conduct of operations in the western zone of operations, in compliance with which the D.I.Panzerarmee retains its former mission, i.e. to gain and hold the line Gafsa ~~Met~~ Metlauoi - Tozeur, while the 5. Pz.Armee will exploit the success it achieved in the Sidi bu Zid area with forces as strong as supplies and the need for mobile reserves permit. (Annex 1094)

The army ^{is} ^{ing} /consider~~x~~ the line Gafsa - Metlauoi - Tozeur - Douz as future main line of resistance. (Annex 1095) However the final course of the line will depend on the development of the situation in the 5. Pz.Armee. At first the army will hold the gained area forward of this line in coordination with the operations of the 5.Pz.Armee and will secure it through ~~with~~ distant reconnaissance. (Annex 1096) The army forces that are available are not adequate for a continuation of the attack on Tabessa. This operation should be supported by the mass of the motorized forces of the 5.Pz.Armee and should follow a simultaneous tying down of the enemy by an attack on

the entire north and center front of the 5.Pz.Armee.

On the basis of these considerations the army has decided to withdraw to the area north of Gabès, the Lw.Jg.Brig.1 as well as elements of the heavy army artillery and flank artillery as army reserve for possible employment at the Mareth front. These elements were held as reserve at noon already by D.A.K. upon orders of the army. The transfer will begin in the evening. In addition the Div. Centauro is ordered to commit its forces reinforced by the 7.Bers.Rgt. in the Gafsa area for defense with front to the north and the west, and to leave the im-mobile elements of the division as support in the former positions east and southeast of el Guettar. (Annex 1097)

The combat group of the D.A.K. receives the order to hold on 18 Feb. with the remaining forces (Pz.Gren.Rgt.Afr., 1 artillery battalion, A.A.33, 1 ~~Rx.~~^{tank} armored battalion, 1 engineer company, 1 antitank company, 1 Italian armored ^{tank} battalion, 1 Italian artillery battalion) the bridgehead positions gained just north of Thelepte and to launch strong reconnaissances against Kasserine and in the direction of Tebessa. Withdrawal in the direction of Gafsa will be effected only in case of strong, superior enemy attack. (Attack 1098)

2. Morning and noon report to O.K.H. (Annex 1099)

18 February 1943

Sequence of events.

a. Southeast front:

The enemy continues vigorous reconnaissance activities in front of the reconnaissance group and of the 15.Pz.Div., but without advancing with stronger forces. All assaults of enemy armored scout cars are repulsed by our artillery fire. No large scale operation is carried out either in the Fom Tatahouine area or against the rearguard position west of Medenine. (Annex 1100)

9

21st Panzer Division, Division Order for the Attack on Sidi Bou Zid, 12 February 1943

Division Order for the attack on Sidi bou Zid

(Operation "Frühlingwind"; 1:200 000 map)

1. No change in the enemy situation.

In the morning of 12 Feb, an air reconnaissance disclosed no movement in the Faid - Sbeitla - Djebel Meloussi area.

2. On D-day at 0 hour the 21st Panzer Div., starting from the defile west of Djebel Gouleb with its bulk swinging around Djebel el Kebar will attack Sidi bou Zid and destroy the enemy located there and to the east thereof, in cooperation with the 10th Pz.Div. attacking from Faid.

3. The following is ordered in that intention:

- a. Kampfgruppe Schütte will open the defile west of Dj. Gouleb during ~~advance~~ phase 1

Distribution: Commander Major Schütte

Troops: Hqs Pz.Gr.Rgt. 104 B
4th Bn., Pz.Gr.Rgt. 104 (less elements remaining at Sened)
1 detachment of the 5th Pz.Rgt.
1st Bn., 155th Arty.Rgt. with 1st and 3d Btries.
1 flak combat detachment (2 8.8cm guns)
Pz.Jg.Bn. 39/609 (self-propelled)

Mission: Kampfgruppe Schütte will facilitate the debouching of the division out of the defile west of Djebel Gouleb by an attack against the enemy forces in the area 7225 - 7205 - 7223 - 7231; it will drive them back northward and will cover the debouching of the bulk of the division to the west by passing to the defensive in the line around and on both sides of 7223, with front to the north.
To that end, armored elements will rush upon the resisting enemy and open the way to the north for the following infantry:

After the occupation of the defensive position by the Grenadiers the armored battalion will be released as soon as possible westward to Kampfgruppe Stenkhoff.

The division reserves the right to remove a light battery and the Hqs of the 1st Bn., 155th Arty. Bn. for other employment, according to the enemy situation.

- b. In the second phase Kampfgruppe Stenkhoff, in a brisk advance over ~~222~~ 7225 - 7231 - 7256 - 7261 - 7264 - 7277 - 7253 will attack on Sidi bou Zid and will destroy the enemy wherever he is found.

Distribution: Commander Lt. Col. Stenkhoff

Troops of the 5th Pz. Rgt. Hqs
1 bn. of 5th Pz. Rgt. (another bn. brought forward later)
Hqs 1st Bn., 155th Arty. Regt. with 2 btries light field
howitzers, (1st and 3d) and 9th Btry, heavy howitzer.
2 flak combat detachments each with 2 8,8 cm guns
1 platoon, 609th Flak
1 platoon, 2d Bn., 25th Flak

Mission: After the opening of the defile by Group Schütte, the Kampfgruppe will immediately advance in a wide ~~xxxxxxx~~ enveloping movement around the spurs of Djebel el Kebir so as to reach the Gafsa-Sidi bou Zid road, will turn on it toward the northeast and will attack on the road or on both sides of it in the direction of Sidi bou Zid. The object is to bring a perceptible relief to the 10th Pz. Div. which is attacking Sidi bou Zid from the east/^{and} the northeast, and then to engage enemy elements and destroy them.

The Kampfgruppe will cover itself in its left flank to the west and the northwest, especially through reconnaissance and security detachments as far as the crossings over the Fekka sector in the line 7268 - 7266.

Any stop which will ^{divert} ~~alter~~ the Kampfgruppe from its real objective Sidi bou Zid will be avoided.

- Reconnaissance*
- a. In the 2d phase the 580th Armored ~~Arty~~ Bn. will move immediately behind the Group Stenkhoff through the defile west of Djebel Gouleb and will march either on the same road or, if it is possible, south thereof, on 7257.

Mission: it will cover the left flank of the division by reconnoissances to the northwest, west, southwest and south ^{to following} in sectors:
right boundary 7256 - 7263 - 7284
left boundary 7258 - 9519 - 9522 as far as the line 7284 - 7291 - 7709 - 9015.

- d. Flak Bn. 609 (less self-propelled antitank gun company), in the 4th phase, will move behind the Armored Reconnaissance Bn. 580 through the defile, and by the same route as Kampfgruppe Stenkhoff will reach the region around 7256 at the disposal of the division.

Mission: Position of readiness in the prescribed area to intercept a possible enemy attack from the northwest (from the direction of 7263) or from the southwest (from the direction of Gafsa). The battalion will assure its own protection locally and will carry out close reconnoissance as far as the line 7255 - 7257. Liaison will be established and hold with the 580th Recon. Bn.

4. Supervision of the ^{exit} ~~movement~~ out of the defile west of Dj. Gouleb.

- a. The commander of the 155th Arty. Rgt. will regulate the artillery protection for the debouching out of the defile by the use of the 3 heavy and 1 light batteries (last named already in position); he will supervise the timely approach of the batteries and their joining their combat groups.

The object is to break at the start any enemy attempt at resistance through energetic sudden fire concentration.

b. The 2d.Bn., 25th Flak will protect the defile west of Dj.Gouleb by putting in line 2 heavy and 1 light batteries against enemy air attacks. The momentary withdrawal of ~~an~~ individual batteries will be ordered later.

5. The 220th Panzer Engineer Bn. will ~~take~~ assume the following missions:

a. A company will take over and supervise the traffic in the defile west of Dj.Gouleb. For that purpose part of the traffic regulating detail of the division will be placed at the disposal of the commander of the 220th Pz.Eng.Bn.

On A-1 Day

/1 officer of each combat group will report by 1200 h. to Cpt.

Streitz to be ~~briefed~~ briefed as to the mine lanes. This officer will be responsible for the time being for the timely arrival of the first vehicle of his column at the mine lanes.

For the passage

~~through~~ through the mine lanes it is further ordered:

The instructions of the commander of the 220th Pz.Eng.Bn. or his representatives will be followed implicitly

The only direction to follow will be from south to north

Traffic in the other direction only after clearance through Captain Streitz.

It is forbidden to face about or stop in the mine lanes without urgent reason; the ~~proceeding~~ troops will move at a brisk pace.

They will follow each other's tracks.

be detailed as

c. A company will/~~detail~~ mine-locating parties to the Kampfgruppen as follows:

For the 5th Pz.Rgt.: 1 officer, 2 non-com.off's., 18 men

(8 detectors) *distributed between*

For 104th (A) Pz.Gr.Rgt.: 1 technical sergeant, 1 non-com., 4 men

(4 detectors)

For 104th (B) Pz.Gr.Rgt.: 1 non-com., 4 men

(2 detectors)

The remainder will be held in reserve at the disposal of the division.

6. Dividing line to the 10th Pz.Div. 71103 (10th Pz.) - 7210 (10th Pz.) - 7233 (21st Pz.) - 7239 (21st Pz.) - 7250 (21st Pz.) - 7273 (10th Pz.) - 7297 (10th Pz.).

The elements in line north of the above boundary will be temporarily under the tactical control of the 10th Pz.Div. beginning at 1000 h. A-1 day.

The 2d Bn., 104th (B) Pz.Gr.Rgt. will remain in its former positions in the north sector. At 1000 h. A-1 day it will pass temporarily under the control of the 10th Pz.Div. but will remain in constant liaison with the 21st Pz.Div. by radio.

New boundary line to the left adjacent unit (Italian Pz.Div. Centauro) 7927 - 9718 - 9507 - 9515 - 9020 (locality to the adjacent unit on the left)

7. South sector.

Effective at 1600 h. A-1 day the division ~~is~~ will take over the command in the south sector. At that time Major Plessing will return to his battalion as commander. Captain Düver will exert operational command in the southern half of the south sector from 7259 (incl.) to the southern divisional boundary; at 1600 h. A-1 day he will be under the direct control of the division.

8. Zero hour

^{time of}
The/debouching of the first elements of Kampfgruppe Schlütke out of the mine field of the defile west of Djebel Gouleb (Z) will be ordered; ^{it will be} probably/~~at~~ 0530 h.

9. Medical Corps: Main dressing station immediately southwest of 7983, prepared by the 1st platoon, 200th Medical Co.; it will be ready to function at 0700 h. A-day.

Advanced main dressing station in the vicinity of 9504, prepared ^{will be} by a light platoon, ready to function at 0700 h. A-day.

10. Advanced prisoner collecting station 9504 will be prepared by the Division Intelligence in cooperation with Division Supply.

Empty returning columns will be utilized for the evacuation of prisoners.

11. Recognition signals: White and green: here we are
Red: Panzer attack; during night concentrated fire.

Extensive use of smoke signals will be made to indicate the front x line. (plane)

12. Completed position of readiness will be reported until A-day Z minus 1 to the advanced division C.P. by wire or messenger (not by radio)

13. Supply strong point of the division: just south of 7202.

14. Signal communications :

The commander of the 200th Pz.Signal Bn. will be responsible for radio communication from the advanced division C.P. to:

Kampfgruppe Schlitta
Stenkhoff
530th Armored Rec.Bn.
609th Flak Bn.
155th Arty. Bn. armored
220th Armored Eng. Bn.
2d Bn., 104th Armored Gr. Rgt.
Kampfgruppe Düver

The C.P. of the operations staff of Pz. A.O.K. 5 (from A-day on) will be just west of 7983.

The air force liaison officer of the commander Air Force Africa will be located in the immediate vicinity of the divisional C.P.; the same for the air force liaison officer for reconnaissance.

The advanced divisional C.P. will be connected by wire with the Maknassy radio detachment and switchboard; hier connection with Kampfgruppe Düver.

15. Advanced divisional combat train: from A-1 day at 1200 h at the south exit of the pass west of 7229.

Hildebrandt, Col. G.S.

Source: 21st Pz. Div. Ia K.T.B. Anlagen Nr. 9 33 135/2
8.1.43 - 31.3.43

10

Hudel and Robinett, "The Tank Battle at Sidi Bou
Zid," Supporting Documentation (Extract) for the
Official History *Northwest Africa: Seizing the
Initiative in the West*

A) Introduction

The two accounts which follow concern the tank battles at SIDI BOU ZID in February 1943. The first account is that of a German officer who took part in the battle about which he writes; the second account is that of an American officer who was also there, although not in the attacking battalion. While we have not had time to send the German officer's account to the author of the second article for comment, we have asked the German to comment on the American version. His comments are appended.

It was the failure of the American counter-attack which necessitated the retreat to KASSERINE. There, Combat Command "B" of the 1st Armored Division, with the 3rd Bn., 16th Inf. Regt. and a battalion of artillery from the 1st Infantry Division attacked--plus remnants of the 19th Engineer Battalion and the 26th Infantry Division (both of which were initially charged with guarding the KASSERINE PASS)--turned back the German attack in the South, while the British 26th Armored Brigade (6th Armored Division) defending THALA, turned it back in the north.

The question at once arises why so important an attack was made by a single tank battalion supported by a single battery of artillery. The answer is twofold: Due to an erroneous estimate of the situation the main German attack was expected through the PICHON-FONDOUCK PASS to the north rather than through the FAID PASS, and Combat Command "B", which, at that time, was the most experienced unit of the 1st Armored Division, was deployed near MAKTAR to meet this expected attack. It only hastened to the south to cover the retreat of the Division after the battle at SIDI BOU ZID had been lost. Secondly, contrary to the expressed wishes of the Division Commander, the 1st Armored Division was deployed in a thin line over an 80-mile front. It was indeed this battle which underlined in the most practical manner possible the oft repeated axiom that an armored division must always be used en masse. Thereafter, in the American Army, it always was.

Last of all, we give a brief resume of the situation as it existed at that time. The British Eighth Army had chased ROMMEL westwards through TRIPOLI and was now pushing him to the north, up the coast of TUNISIA. The British First Army, with the American I Corps attached, was holding the eastern heights of TUNISIA forming the western wall of a cylinder, bordered on the north and east by water and in the south by the piston-like Eighth Army. As this army advanced the compression increased, and the pressure against the western wall of the cylinder was enormous. The wall burst at FAID and the breach was repaired only after KASSERINE.

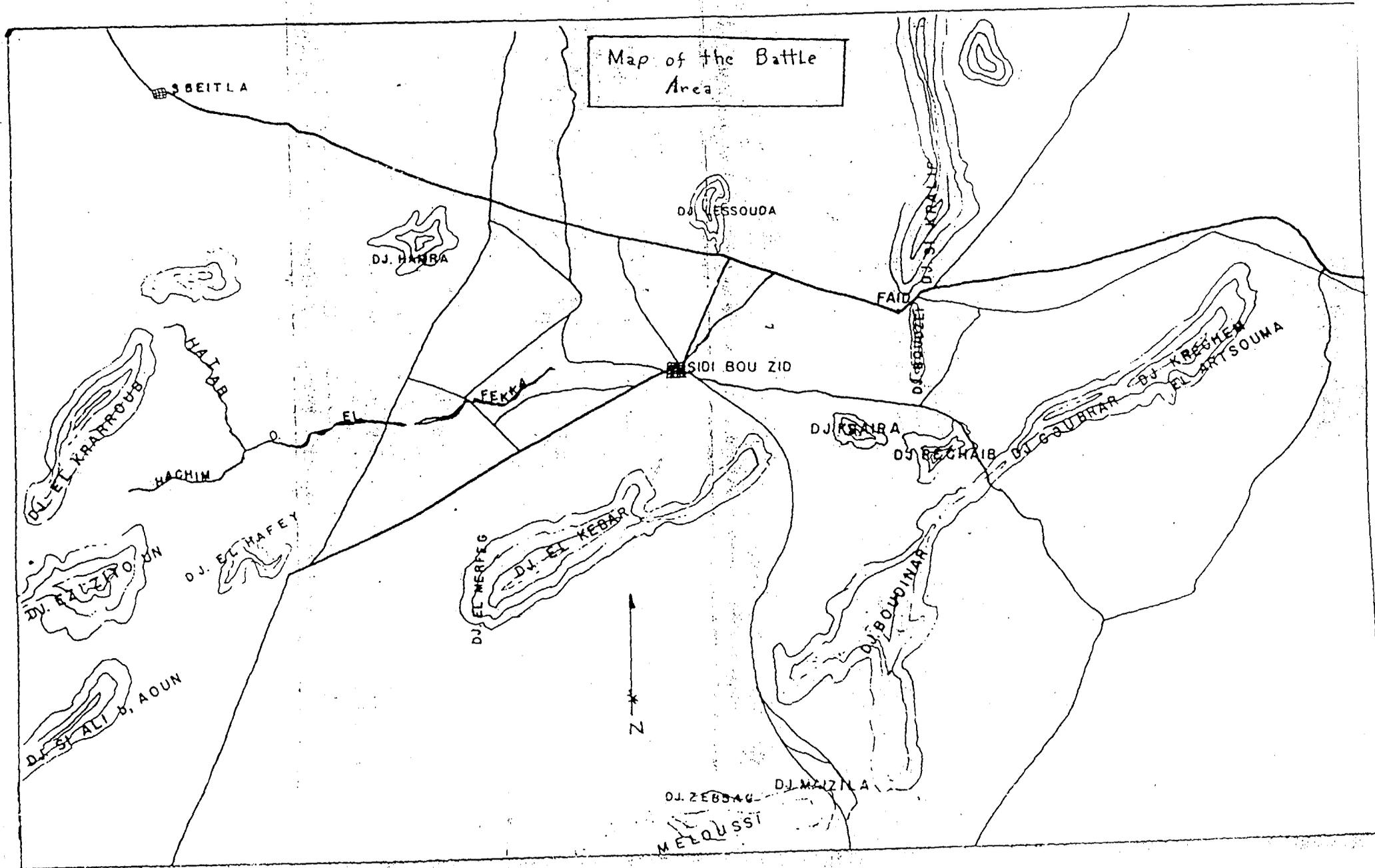
B) Major HUDEL's account of the capture of SIDI BOU ZID

In February 1943 a comparatively static situation had developed in the Northern Tunisian sector. A surprise breakthrough of American forces into the city of TUNIS and to the coast was no

- B 15 -

C O N F I D E N T I A L





longer threatening. However, judging by the results of reconnaissance missions there was a danger that American armored forces, which were assembled west of FAID PASS, would push through to SFAJ and the coast. The Tunisian Army (NORD GRUPPE) and the German AFRIKA Corps would have been cut off from each other by such action.

In order to prevent this, available armored troops were ordered to attack the American assembly area.

A Combat Group of the 10th Panzer Division was to push ahead from FAID PASS to the area north of SIDI BOU ZID. A Combat Group of the 21 Panzer Division was to attack through a mountain range from the south and was to capture the town.

Under the cover of night a tank battalion of the 10th Panzer Division moved into an assembly area which was located in an olive grove east of FAID PASS. During the initiation of the armored attack at 0400 a heavy sand storm was encountered causing an almost entire loss of vision; as through a miracle no accidents happened, mostly thanks to the experienced veterans who comprised the crews of tanks.

The battalion moved at a slow speed through the FAID PASS which was guarded by Italian troops. Engineers had cleared a mine field during the night and signaled with dimmed lights the route to be taken. Beyond the pass the battalion turned north. Despite darkness and the continuing sand storm it advanced with the highest possible speed.

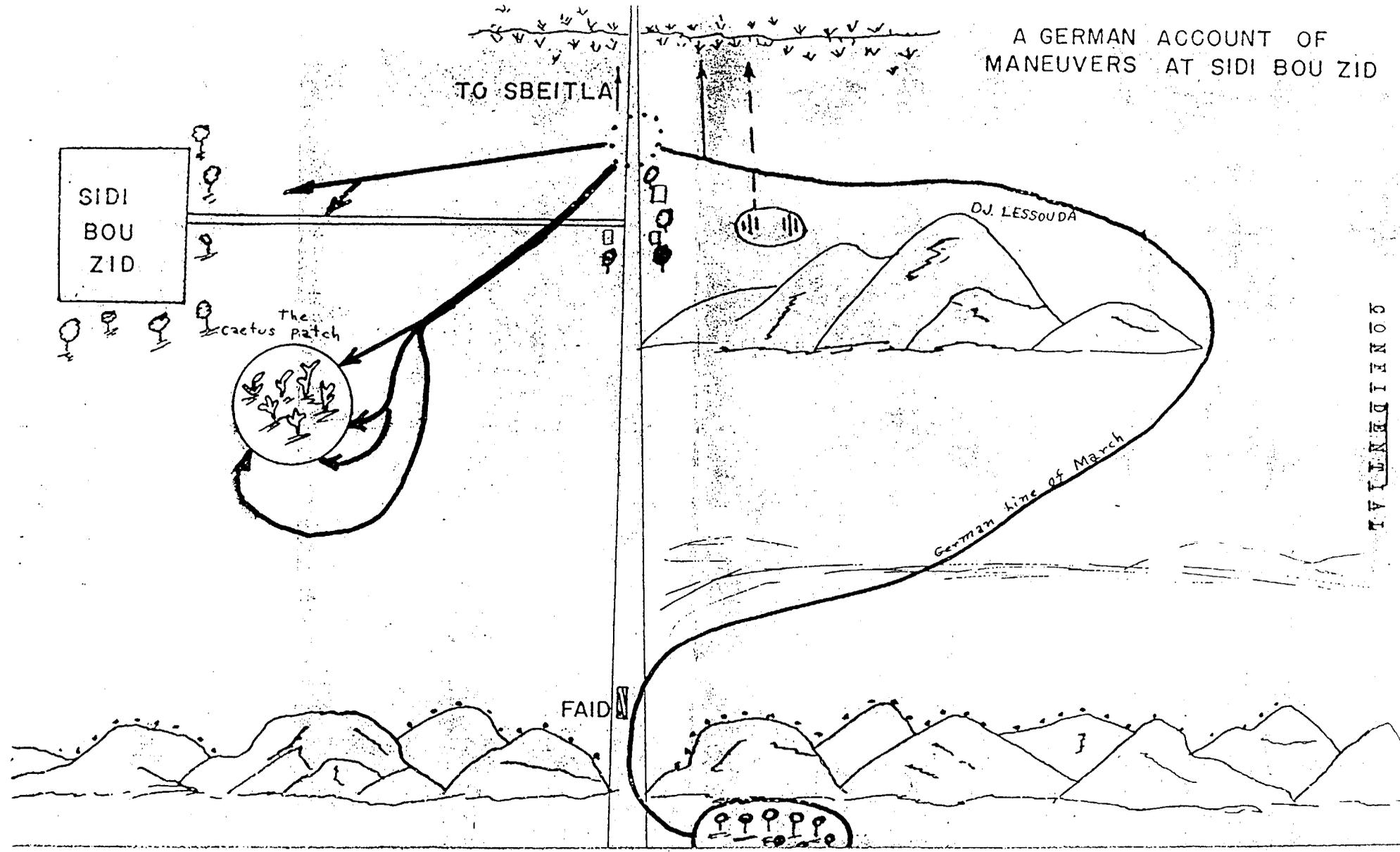
The terrain had been reconnoitered carefully the previous day; towards the east of FAID PASS flat prairie land extended to the SBEITLA PASS. A rocky mountain range was looming up steeply to the north of the road. The town of SIDI BOU ZID is located south of the road as an oasis in the monotonous countryside.

By daybreak the battalion was located in line with the mountain range. Suddenly strong artillery fire was received from guns located on the other side of the mountain, (directed by observers located on top of the mountain). It was mandatory now to get around the bend as quickly as possible in order to be able to attack the artillery. In order to cope with any surprises the companies were moving one behind the other. In that way they only had to execute a left or a right flank movement in order to be ready for defensive action on a wide front.

Continuous fire kept coming in from the hills; this, however, was not permitted to bother the tanks in any way as it was a job for the infantry following up behind. The battalion now turned southwest. The American self-propelled artillery tried to move its position towards the west. Now a race started; shortly before reaching the road the leading company of the battalion caught up with the American guns which now tried to escape through the open terrain, but got stalled in swampy ground. They were put out of action and the battalion's light platoon (leichter Zug der Abteilung) was left to guard them.

After this pursuit it became necessary to reassemble the battalion. A counter-attack from any direction had to be reckoned

A GERMAN ACCOUNT OF
MANEUVERS AT SIDI BOU ZID



CONFIDENTIAL

with. Therefore the tanks were assembled in a 360° defensive position near the FAID-SBEITLA road. The objective had been reached.

Suddenly two STUART tanks (i.e. light tanks) appeared from behind a rise in the terrain; after a short fire fight they started retreating in a westerly direction, but they were interrupted on the road.

All telescopes searched the terrain to the south of us; there was no sign of the other German Panzer Division. Perhaps SIDI BOU ZID had been captured already by the Germans, or had the attack been repulsed?

The guessing was not to last very long. Shells suddenly started pouring on the tense battlefield. The red flashes of shells could be seen whizzing through the brown and black clouds of smoke. To the south continuous flashes could be observed. Everyone thought it to be the start of the expected counter attack. The tanks were checked over one more; it would be a hard fight. At present the distance was still too great; we had to save our ammunition.

But the gunfire in the south did not move any closer; however it was increasing and getting more accurate. The tank crews' tension was nearing the breaking point when the following message came over the radio from Division Headquarters: "Advance of 21 Panzer Division from south has been delayed; Tank Battalion is to continue attack and to capture SIDI BOU ZID."

The tanks were regrouped quickly; two companies to the front, two companies to the rear.

Covered by clouds of dust and smoke the road was crossed; already the situation could be observed better. The defensive fire from artillery and tanks was originating from the cactus grove to the north of SIDI BOU ZID. A frontal attack south would have meant certain destruction for the German Mark III and IV tanks because of the great power of penetration emanating from the guns of the SHERMAN tanks. Camouflaged by the clouds of dust the battalion dispersed widely towards the east and west. The engines were strained to their utmost capacity; this maneuver succeeded to split up the defensive fire.

Upon that the companies started moving towards the cactus grove from all directions. The enemy fought back hard and tenaciously. Even after the German tanks had moved on to the paths leading through the cactus grove, SHERMANS appeared continuously firing from shortest distances, which at times were only five to ten meters. However they were unable to hold out very long because German tanks were moving in from everywhere. Some SHERMANS which tried to retreat were stalled on swampy terrain. The quick push prevented an American reconnaissance plane from getting off the ground.

In late afternoon the battalion reassembled and formed a hedgehog like formation. After adequate cover had been prepared one company felt its way towards the town. They reached their

objective around 1800 hours and found it unoccupied. They were ordered back after having been relieved by our infantry.

The battalion remained outside the town over night. The tanks were readied in a great hurry because an American counter-attack had to be counted with by the next day at the latest.

The following are my conclusions: The sandstorm brought the great advantage with it in as much as approaching German tanks could not be heard from a great distance. American security outposts had not been advanced.

The direction of attack was chosen right. A frontal attack to the West would have been wrong. If possible one should choose the road on which the least resistance is to be expected and one should try to go around the opponent.

The troops on top of the mountain range held out valiantly. They tried again and again to stop the German tank attack although they had almost no cover on the bare rock. The self-propelled guns kept firing too long and changed their position too late; that is why they could be cut off later on.

The tanks and artillery located in the cactus grove north of SIDI BOU ZID started firing on too great a distance and thereby gave away their position too early. The SHERMAN's gun was feared greatly by the German tanks at that time. It pierced Mark III and IV tanks frontally at a distance of 1500 meters. On the other hand the German Tank Battalion was armed almost exclusively with 50mm guns and with only a few 75mm guns. That is why the German tanks would have run into trouble had the SHERMANS taken advantage of their great mobility. The use of tanks as anti tank weapons on desert and prairie terrain is not right.

The battle for SIDI BOU ZID is an excellent example showing that the mobility of tanks should also be used in a defensive situation. A tank battle on such territory can be compared to a naval engagement, as a lot depends upon quick assembly and execution.

C) An American officer's account of the counter-attack at SIDI BOU ZID

The Battle of SIDI BOU ZID was fought on the 14th day of February 1943 and was the first battle in a series of engagements that resulted in the stand at KASSERINE PASS on the part of Combat Command "B" of the 1st Armored Division with certain elements of the 1st Infantry Division attached and 26th Armored Brigade of the British 1st Army with, after the battle had opened, certain American field artillery battalions attached.

Contrary to general belief, the loss of the Battle of SIDI BOU ZID was caused not by the engagement which took place between ROMMEL's spearheads and a single tank battalion of the 1st Armored Regiment but by the dispositions of the entire 1st Armored Division which, over its vehement protest, was not allowed to concentrate in any one place for the purpose of counter-attacking the German thrust which all knew was imminent, but which, on the contrary, was spread over 80 miles of mountainous front.

The immediate engagement here under review was decisive in that it showed that the Americans could make no stand in front of the KASSERINE PASS and in that it permitted the German capture, or at least neutralization, of our two air bases at THELPTE and FERIANA. Thereafter, but for the stubborn resistance at KASSERINE PASS, ROMMEL might well have overrun the great American supply base at TEBESSA and split the American II Corps from the rest of the British Army to the North. For this reason the Battle of SIDI BOU ZID was an extremely important and, from our point of view, unfortunate engagement. The following account was given by a member of the 1st Armored Division, who has had an opportunity and indeed the duty of conducting a limited research into the action in question. Much of his account is gathered from eye witnesses who, incidentally, are never the best judges of any battle since they necessarily see only a small portion of the battlefield. The author himself was some 80 miles north, at MAKTAR, while the battle was fought and therefore probably takes a more objective view of the action. It is not pretended that this account is definitive or even correct in all details but it is here reproduced in order to show American reactions in a fight in which we were outnumbered, outgunned and surprised.

The date 30-31 January is selected as an arbitrary date for this account of the Battle of SIDI BOU ZID, TUNISIA.

On 31 January Combat Command "A" of the 1st Armored Division and attached units attempted unsuccessfully to drive the Germans from the high ground in the vicinity of FAID village and force an entry through FAID and RABAOU Passes. The command was then disposed in a defensive position with the mission of preventing further enemy advance to the west.

During the period 1 February-13 February, extensive reconnaissance of the area was made by the Reconnaissance Company of the 1st Armored Regiment and elements of the 81st Reconnaissance Battalion. Defensive works including barbed wire and mine fields were erected. It was generally recognized that the impending German attack, if and when it came, would probably come through FAID PASS and other smaller passes in that area. Based upon reports of officers from II Corps Headquarters after an inspection of the area on 12 February, Combat Command "A" was ordered to make necessary dispositions in order to hold the features of DJ^{*} LESSOUDA and DJ KSAIRA at all costs. To carry out this mission these features were occupied by forces of reinforced infantry of about equal strength and work on defensive measures was redoubled. During the period 1-14 February the composition of Combat Command "A" fluctuated however.

During the afternoon of 13 February forward observers at DJ KSAIRA reported heavy enemy truck movement in the vicinity of MATLEG which further substantiated the belief that an attack was imminent. Air support was called for and our aircraft succeeded in destroying many enemy vehicles, however, not until their cargoes of infantry had been discharged. This enemy truck movement consisted of at least twenty groups of sixteen trucks each and constituted an estimated strength of one infantry regiment. Front line observers and listening posts reported tank noises throughout the night of 13-14 February, and there was no question but what an attack would come within a matter of hours. It was felt that the

* Abbreviation for DJEBEL - i.e. mountain or hill

main effort would be made through FAID PASS as this was the nearest route to an obvious objective, DJ LESSOUDA. A previous reconnaissance by tanks to determine the condition of the road through the small pass between DJ SIDI KRSLIF and DJ E AKROUTA had caused the enemy to react to violently that it was felt that he certainly intended using this pass in future operations. The reconnaissance reported the pass impassable for armored vehicles, however, later information revealed that enemy engineers were preparing roads for armored vehicles at the time the reconnaissance was made. Therefore, future actions included a careful vigilance over the area. Extensive reconnaissance was conducted daily in the area southeast of SIDI BOU ZID in the direction of DJ MAZILA to determine enemy dispositions in the area and to determine his attitude towards the MAZILA PASS itself. It was revealed that enemy anti tank defenses were present and that the enemy was carrying on an extensive counter-reconnaissance in the same area. Several vehicle and a few personnel losses were incurred during the period prior to 14 February.

During the early evening of 13 February the commander of the Allied Forces* in AFRICA paid a visit to the command post of Combat Command "A". He expressed satisfaction with the defenses in the area and stressed the importance of holding the position. A reinforced infantry detachment, acting as a listening post was established in the vicinity of the western entrance to FAID PASS and equipped with a radio to provide instant communication with the commanding officer of the LESSOUDA force. In some manner this force was apparently surprised and overcome by the Germans for no report was ever received from it.

Defensive preparations included mine fields between DJ KSAIRA and GARET HADID and between DJ KSAIRA and DJ RECHAIB which were adequately covered by automatic weapons fire from the 16th Engineers and elements of the 168th Infantry. DJ KSAIRA had been nearly completely wired in with barbed wire. German mines in the pass at RABAOU had been supplemented by our own mines.

The Germans opened their attack at 0620 February 14, by an artillery bombardment of our positions on and around DJ LESSOUDA. At the same time enemy armor began its attack from FAID and from the small pass between DJ KRSLIF and DJ E AKROUTA. The latter force was composed of about forty MK 4 and MK 6** tanks supported by infantry and 88mm dual purpose antitank guns.

No warning from the listening post near FAID PASS was received and it is believed that the Company Commander, "G" Company, 1st Armored Regiment, who was in position with ten tanks just east of DJ LESSOUDA, was completely surprised by this attacking force. Just at dawn he had reported a force of infantry moving among the houses to his immediate front, but presumed them to be a part of our own forces. His orders were not to fire until this force was definitely identified and immediately thereafter the German tanks which were in concealed positions immediately to the front opened fire and completely annihilated that part of Company "G". The only report of the presence of the enemy in this area, up until this time, came from an officer of this company who reported tanks moving west on the south side of FAID-LESSOUDA road.***

* General EISENHOWER

** = i.e. "Tiger" tanks

*** At this point it should be noted the very definite effect of the failure of intelligence.

C O N F I D E N T I A L

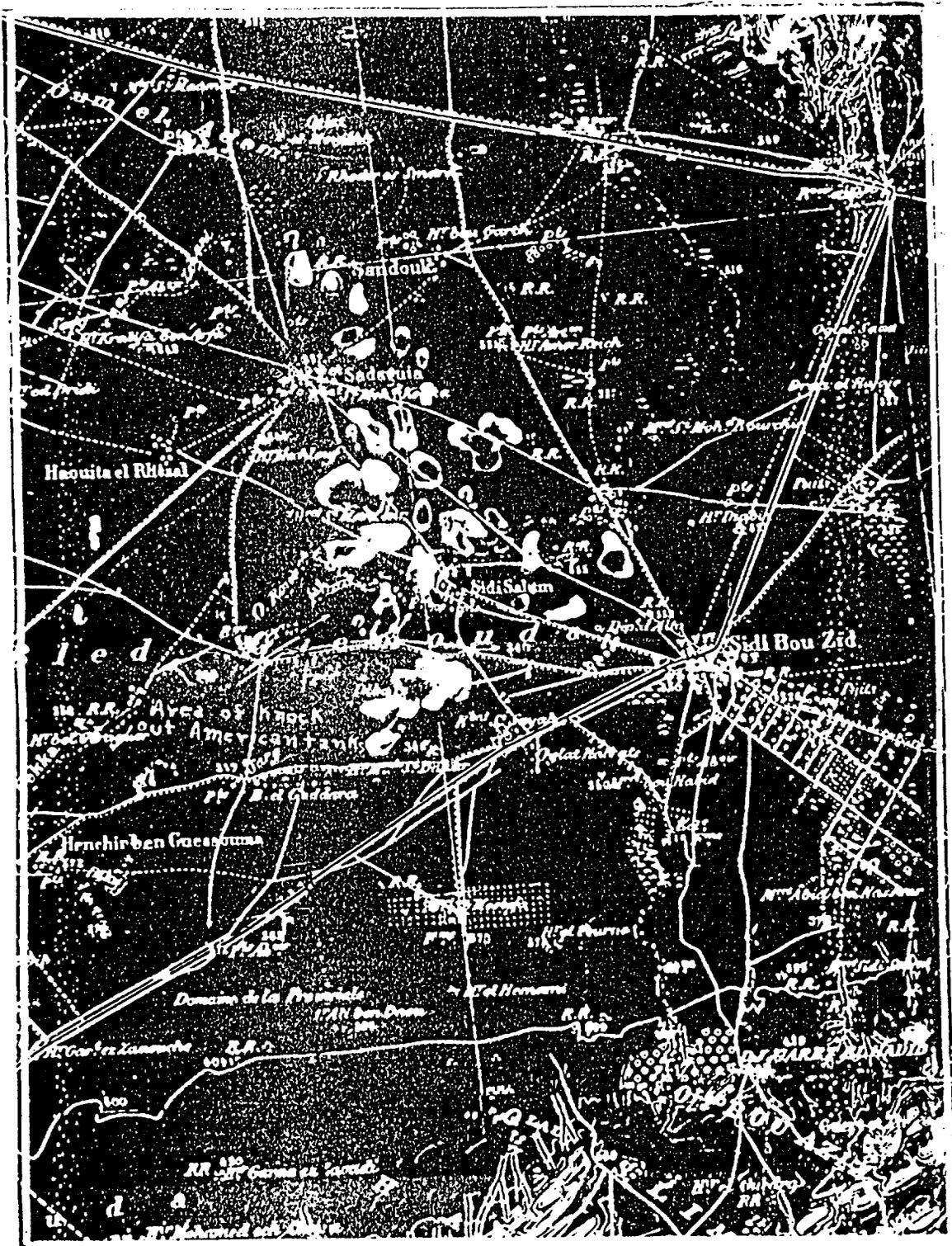
The executive officer of the 3rd Battalion, with the five remaining tanks of "G" Company and his own tank, from a position in a wadi just west of DJ LESSOUDA moved as quickly as possible to the assistance of "G" Company. However, by that time our resistance east of LESSOUDA had been overcome and the enemy had occupied the LESSOUDA OASIS with his antitank guns and tanks. As our tanks approached the oasis they were taken under fire from that area and immediately destroyed.

Battery "B" of the 91st Field Artillery had been overrun, and with the exception of one gun, had been destroyed. The platoon of "A" Company, 701st Tank Destroyer had also been overrun by the enemy tanks and destroyed. Reconnaissance Company and elements of 2nd Battalion, 168th Infantry had retired to the high ground on DJ LESSOUDA.

The Commanding Officer, 3rd Battalion, 1st Armored Regiment, immediately upon hearing the opening artillery barrage at 0620, prepared to move the remainder of his battalion from the area about one and one-half miles southwest of SIDI BOU ZID, to the relief of the LESSOUDA force. Upon receiving orders from Headquarters, Combat Command "A", about 0730, Companies "I" and "H" with Battalion Headquarters began rapid movement towards LESSOUDA. Battery "A", 91st Field Artillery, supported this move from position very close proximity of CP, CC "A". Fire was fairly effective and later reports indicated that for a time the German force at LESSOUDA OASIS was thrown into confusion. By this time a force of German tanks, about forty in number, had moved around the northwest side of DJ LESSOUDA, probably from the pass at KEF EL ABIOD, and were in position on the southwest slopes of LESSOUDA to assist the tanks that had attacked from FAID PASS, and which were, at that time, in the LESSOUDA OASIS. This whole force engaged what remained of the 3rd Battalion, which was deployed to the east and west across the SIDI BOU ZID - POSTE DE LESSOUDA road. It was immediately obvious, that due to the overwhelming superiority in numbers and in fire power of the enemy tanks, that the 3rd Battalion would be unable to halt the German advance to the south. Therefore, the Battalion Commander ordered a withdrawal towards SIDI BOU ZID, delaying from position to position. Combat Command "A" Headquarters was advised of this action and further advised to withdraw the CP to the west or be encircled. Orders were issued and the Headquarters prepared to move to an area near ZAAFRIA. This move was begun at about 1100.

Shortly after the 3rd Battalion began its move towards LESSOUDA the remainder of Company "C", 16th Engineer Battalion, was ordered to take position vicinity of the mine field between DJ KSAIRA and GARET HADID to assist "A" Company, 81st Reconnaissance in that area.

Intermittently, during the morning enemy tanks were reported to the MAZILA PASS area, however, these reports later developed to be rumors and the only enemy in that area during the morning consisted of two truck loads of engineers, who apparently had the mission of lifting the mine field. These troops were surprised by Company "A", 81st Reconnaissance Battalion, and surrendered with little resistance. It was obvious that enemy information, as regards progress of their own troops, was faulty at that time.



Where our tanks were knocked out.

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~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

At 0830, Company "C", 81st Reconnaissance Battalion from position south of BIR EL DJEDRA reported thirty-four enemy tanks carrying infantry troops moving west out of MELLOUSSI PASS. These tanks were taken under fire by "C" Company and the enemy infantry was forced to dismount. "C" Company began to withdraw, fighting a delaying action in front of these tanks. The tanks were followed by other vehicles carrying personnel and by 1500 14 February they had reached BIR EL HAFEY. This force continued to push to the north evidently endeavoring to join with the northern claw of what was obviously a double envelopment of the American force. It was generally believed by some that these tanks were after the trains of the 168th Infantry which the Germans knew were southwest of SIDI BOU ZID. Company "C" had done much to delay the enemy and to them should go much credit for the Germans' inability to close their pincers until later. The Company continued to withdraw and laid a mine field across the road at WADI FEKKA and then took up a defensive position on DJ RAKRATE which they held for twenty-four hours.

As the 3rd Battalion, 1st Armored Regiment began its withdrawal towards SIDI BOU ZID they were supported by the two remaining batteries of the 91st Field Artillery which were displacing westward by battery. At the same time the 2nd Battalion, 17th Field Artillery, began to move to new positions over the route SIDI BOU ZID - BIR EL HAFEY road. This Battalion was attacked by German tanks moving up from the south and by Stuka dive bombers. It was completely destroyed as they moved along the road. The remainder of the 3rd Battalion reorganized as best they could in the vicinity of SIDI BOU ZID and then proceeded west towards KEEN'S CROSS ROAD covering the withdrawal of the vehicles of Headquarters Combat Command "A" and other thin skin vehicles of the various units of the Combat Command which were attempting to move to the west. During this time the troops were under constant bombing from the air and many vehicles were lost. German tanks entered in this action and only for the determined action of the Battalion Commander, Lieutenant Colonel LOUIS V. HIGHTOWER, there is no question but that the entire Combat Command would have either been killed or captured. At that time twelve medium tanks of the 3rd Battalion were still in action, ten covering the north flank of the withdrawal and two covering the south flank. These latter two, one with a jammed gun, and three light tanks were under Colonel HIGHTOWER's immediate command.

The Headquarters of Combat Command under guidance of the Headquarters Commandant attempted to establish a new CP vicinity of ZAFRIAA, however, it was surprised by enemy tanks in position in the many cactus patches and nearly totally destroyed.

Due to the poor quality of the gasoline which contained a great deal of water, it was necessary for the crews of the thin skin vehicles to stop many times under direct enemy fire and remove water from sediment bulbs before proceeding. Many losses of vehicles occurred due to this fact. For some reason this difficulty was not encountered with the tanks. On 13 February Combat Command "A" had ordered the removal of all unnecessary supporting trucks to the vicinity of SBEITLA and but for this, additional losses of vehicles could certainly have been expected.

* At this point we had no air cover at all.

During the mid day hours, the Commanding Officer, 168th Infantry, learning of the presence of enemy tanks in the area, and due to the lack of artillery and other support, moved all elements of the 168th Infantry southwest of SIDI BOU ZID onto the high ground DJ KSAIRA and GARET HADID. Company "C", 16th Engineer Battalion and Company "A", 81st Reconnaissance, later moved onto this high ground.

As darkness came the remaining vehicles of Headquarters Combat Command "A" and the 3rd Battalion, 1st Armored Regiment, were in assembly area vicinity of KERN'S CROSS ROAD. The KSAIRA FORCE had been isolated on DJ KSAIRA and GARET HADID. The LESSOUDA FORCE had taken up defensive positions on and around DJ LESSOUDA. Both forces were being subjected to desultory fire by enemy mortars and artillery. The remaining guns of the 91st Armored Field Artillery Battalion were in position to support the remainder of Combat Command "A" and the 1st Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry, which had been in reserve positions vicinity KERN'S CROSS ROAD and DJ HAMRA.

Preparations were made for further defensive actions and plans made to assist, as far as possible, in the counter-attack of Combat Command "C" which was to relieve the LESSOUDA and KSAIRA force and which was scheduled for early the next day.

Combat Command "C", 1st Armored Division, was moved from the MAKTAR and HADJEB EL AIOUNE areas during the afternoon and night of 14 February to relieve the situation at SIDI BOU ZID, and rescue the units which had been cut off by the German encirclement. The 2nd Battalion of the 1st Armored Regiment, still uninitiated in battle, was to be the assault force of the attack. With orders to debauch the enemy from the area west of a line through LESSOUDA, SIDI BOU ZID, DJ EL KEBAR, the attack was launched from the vicinity of KERN'S CROSS ROAD. In a modified wedge formation, "D" Company led, "E" Company followed, slightly echeloned to the right. "F" Company was the support company and followed Companies "D" and "E". Batteries "B" and "C" of the 68th Field Artillery moved in behind the tanks to furnish covering fire and infantry followed the tanks. Moving directly south toward ZAAFRIA, the Battalion traveled approximately two miles cross country then out to the east toward SIDI BOU ZID.

WADI ROUANA was crossed without incident by the leading company, but as "E" Company began to cross enemy artillery fire began to come from the vicinity of an olive grove just at the north edge of SIDI BOU ZID. As if on signal a large white flare arose from the German positions with such brilliance as to be almost blinding. Apparently this was the signal for the enemy attack, for at that instance more artillery began to open up on the attacking tanks. The fire seemed to be coming from the hills and cactus patches south and east of SIDI BOU ZID. Several tanks of "D" Company were hit by the long range fire.

As the tanks turned to bring fire on the artillery positions, the batteries of the 68th Field Artillery began counter battery fire and were successful in silencing the battery at the north edge of the town.

As the above action was taking place thirty enemy tanks were sighted moving north from the low hills of DJ EL KEBAR. It was evident that these tanks had the mission of cutting behind the American tanks and thereby isolating them. Company "F" moved from the rear of the 2nd Battalion and attempted to block this new threat. Another group of eight German tanks moved further to the west in an effort to get still more in the rear of the Americans. These tanks were stopped by the direct fire of "C" Battery, 68th Field Artillery. The rest of the enemy tanks advancing from the south continued moving until they were on the flank of the Battalion. German accounts of this action, later described in the German public press, stated that the American tanks were first sighted moving across the front of the battalion whose movements were just described. Large clouds of dust kicked up by the American tanks attracted the attention of the German observers. At the time of discovery the Americans were about 3,000 meters away. All German tank crews were out of their tanks and resting for a coming attack.

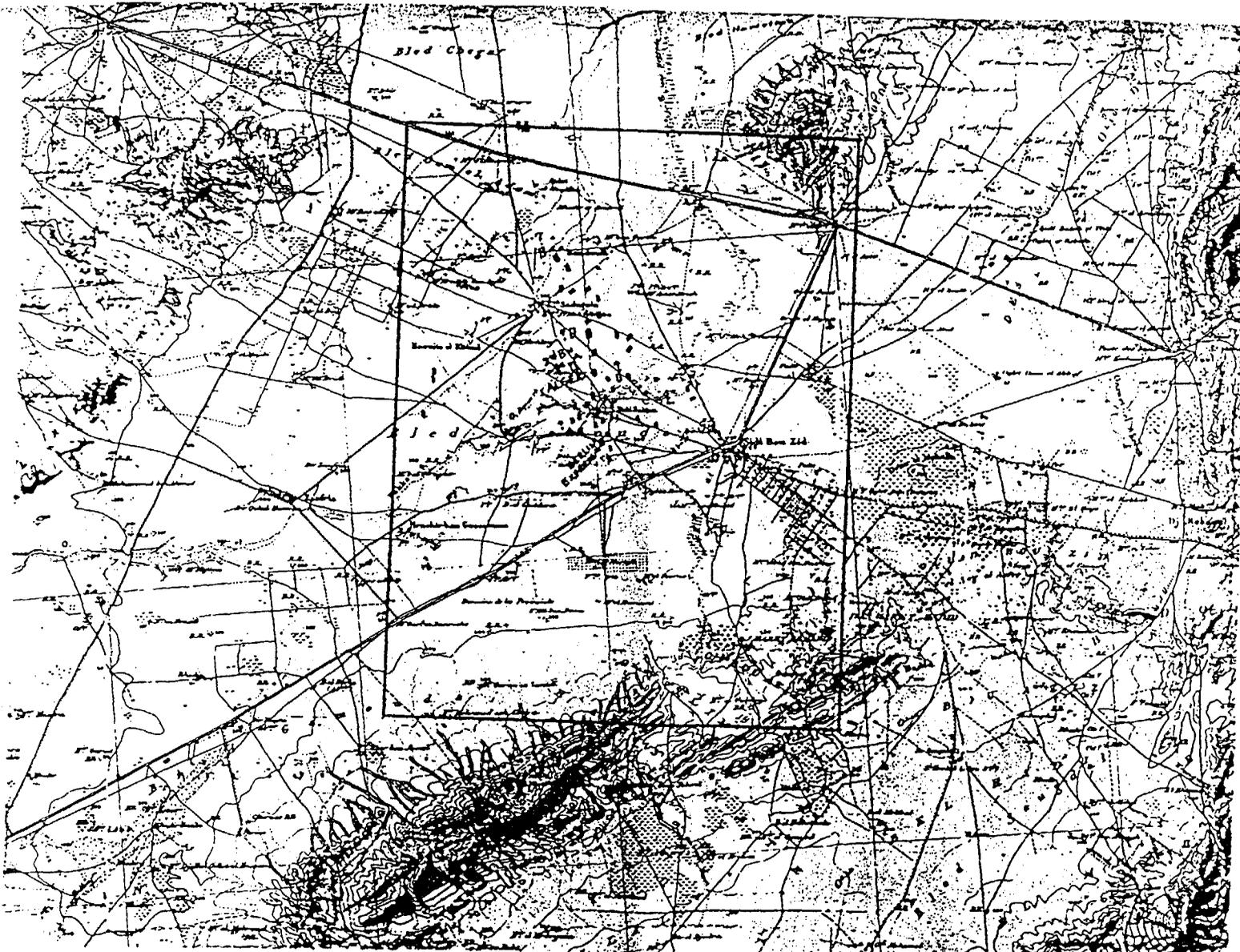
As the thrust from the south was met, thirty more enemy tanks were seen approaching from the northeast toward SIDI SALEM. German tactics became apparent. The artillery was to pin down the advancing Americans while the tanks moved in from either flank for the kill. The fire of the 68th Field Artillery was shifted from counter battery to the advancing tanks near SIDI BOU ZID. Three enemy tanks were destroyed.

Further north at the base of DJ LESSOUDA 12 to 15 German tanks including one Mark VI were sighted moving along the SBEITLA-FAID road. At the time of their discovery the head of the column had reached WADI NEGGADA. From the OP on KAT ZEBBUS the fire of the 91st Field Artillery was directed on these tanks. Accurate fire broke up the formation and the tanks turned south. They were lost in the falling light and dust. Six or eight tanks from "G" Company, 13th Armored Regiment, under command of Captain MC WATTERS were in reserve just east of KERN'S CROSS ROADS and were ordered to move against the enemy threat from LESSOUDA, but when the tanks were lost from sight, the order was rescinded.

Throughout the attack of the 2nd Battalion the reserve and the supporting artillery were subjected to intense air attacks. The 3rd Battalion of the 6th Armored Infantry was pinned to the ground by the intense enemy artillery fire and could do little to aid the situation.

As darkness neared, and casualties mounted, the beleaguered 2nd Battalion began to withdraw toward the northwest. In doing so they ran into the cross fire from the tanks on the north and those on the south. Of the fifty-two tanks that went into the action forty-six were lost. Four failed to reach the battlefield proper because of mechanical failure.

Little is known of the American troops isolated on DJ GARET HADID and vicinity. As the American tanks approached the town of SIDI SALEM at the beginning of the attack, a radio message was received from the 168th Infantry which stated that German tanks were approaching their position. Apparently the tanks on the northeast side of SIDI BOU ZID were those to which the message



APPROXIMATE POSITION OF DESTROYED U.S. TANKS
 (As surveyed three weeks later)

BROWN = Company D
 PURPLE = Company E
 RED = Company F
 Tanks marked
 □ are HQ 2/1st AR
 Those with ? are
 unidentified

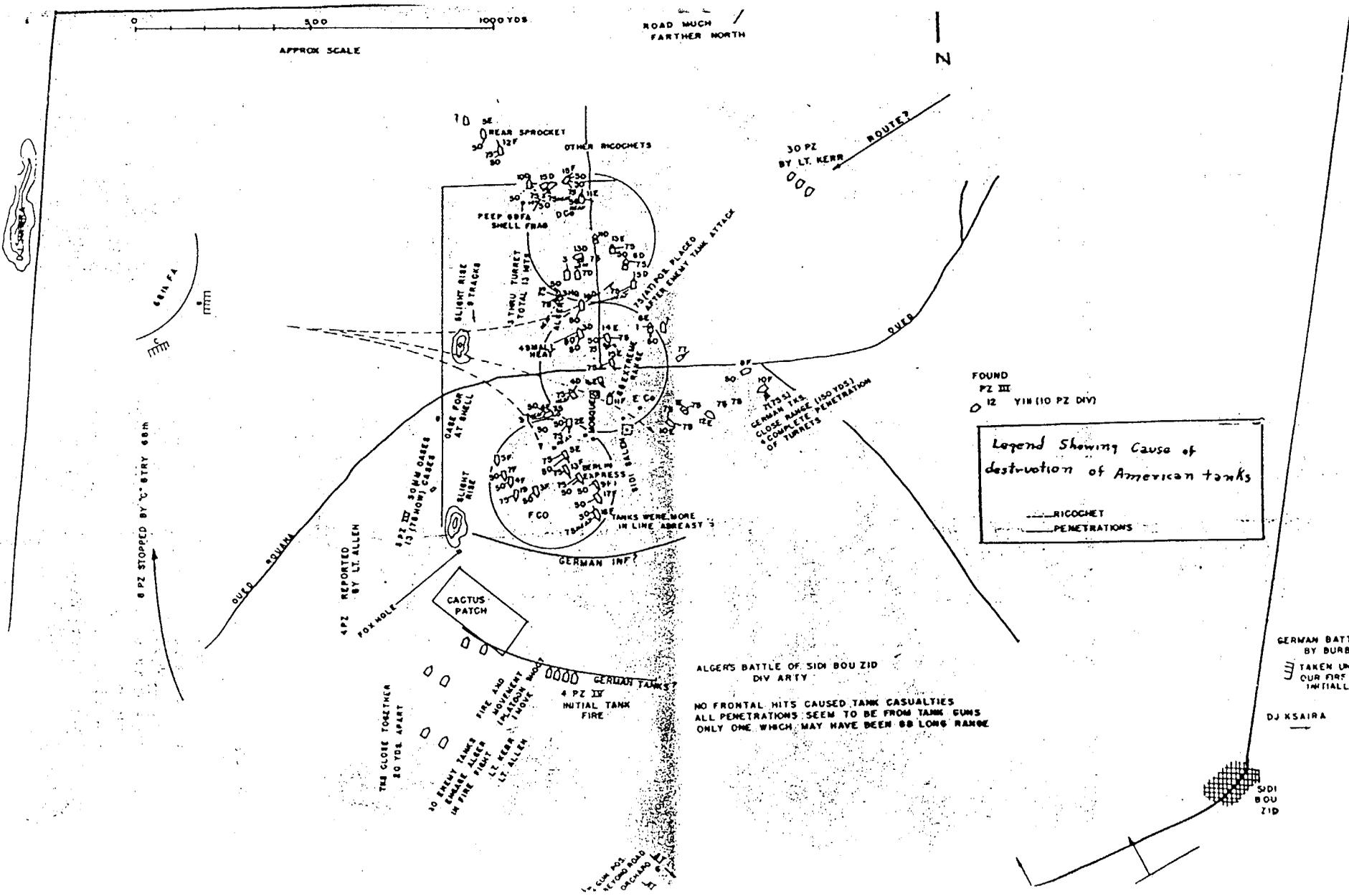
referred. It was thought that the 168th Infantry had mistaken our tanks for those of the enemy, therefore the message was sent back, "Get ready to ride on the band wagon!" -- indicating that relief was on the way. As far as can be determined this was the last contact with the surrounded troops. A few of the men from the 168th, "A" Company of the 81st Reconnaissance Battalion and "C" Company of the 16th Engineers were able to make their way to safety after dark. Others, less fortunate, were cut down by German machine gun and rifle fire, and still others were betrayed by Arabs as they hid in wadis and in cactus patches. The rapid enemy advance to the west caused many to spend days behind the enemy lines. These men were eventually rescued after the German defeat on the FOUSSANA PLAIN 21-25 February.

D) Notes on Part C by Major HUDEL

The following notes are based on Major HUDEL's own experiences during the engagement when he commanded a Combat Group of the 10th German Panzer Division.

The report deals in part with a great many details on which Major HUDEL cannot offer any comment because no German reference material is available to him at this time. He lists the following points which were different, or at least were evaluated differently on the German side.

1. ROMMEL was not in command of the participating combat groups during the battle for SIDI BOU ZID. He assumed command only shortly before the battle of KASSERINE PASS.
2. There existed no superiority in weapons on the German side, although at certain points there might have been superiority in weapons temporarily. The main advantage to the Germans was the fact that the tank crews had gained experience in previous engagements on other battlefields.
3. The German attack to the west could only come through FAID PASS. Another possible route of attack did not exist for a large tank force.
4. It is astonishing that, according to the report, the Germans had the element of surprise. As a result of observations made by the Americans on 13 February security guards should have been placed further forward.
5. Lack of detailed knowledge about the German attack from the south and southwest enables Major HUDEL only to remark that it was delayed longer than expected on 14 February, and that it did not reach the objective.
6. The effectiveness of the German airforce and artillery is given far too much credit in this report. During the attack on the town itself the air and artillery support was immaterial.
7. The American counter-attack on 15 February did not come quite unexpected, as a German observation-plane had reported the advance of American armor. This report, however, was not properly evaluated, a fact which caused a certain carelessness and subsequent surprise to the German troops.



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8. The offensive from the west came only through FAID PASS. The German main effort was directed to the northwest and around the north edge of DJ LESSOUDA at first, and from there to the south and southwest. Only weak forces were committed along the large road with the order to deceive the Americans and tie down American forces.

2d and 3d Battalions, 168th Infantry, History
(Extract), 3-19 February 1943

The Regiment occupied these positions in general except for a continuous moving of the Second Battalion ahead and to the northeast (or left) from February 8 to the morning of February 14, when the enemy offensive started through Faid Pass.

During this period a defensive attitude was taken by C.C.L. and large amounts of wire and mine installations were ordered. Patrol activity was very active on both sides, resulting in the loss of one officer and three men killed and three enemy prisoners taken. The prisoners were taken by a patrol headed by Lt. Col. Van Vliet against occupied enemy positions in front of the Third Battalion.

The period February 8 to 19 is covered by reports accompanied by overlays which were submitted by officers who were with the several units of the Regiment at that time. The positions and activities of these units during this time beginning with the Second Battalion, is as follows:

Report of Activities of the Second Battalion, 168th Infantry, from February 3 to February 19, 1943.

February 3, 4, 1943.

On our withdrawal from the Soned area, February 3 and 4, the battalion, less Company "G" (which was stationed at the Tholopte Airport) traveled to Fariana arriving at 0700 hours. On February 4 the battalion was ordered to move to Sbiotla. Company "G" was to join the column at Tholopte, the movement to start at dark.

February 5, 6, 1943.

The night of February 5 we bivouaced in an olive grove two miles east of Sbiotla. The next morning, February 6, Colonel Drake called me to his quarters and told me my battalion would move under cover of darkness to Sidi Bou Zid to be attached to the 1st Armored Division. I called my company commanders together and spent the day on reconnaissance of the Sidi Bou Zid area. On arrival at Sidi Bou Zid I reported to General McQuillan, commanding the 1st Armored Division. General McQuillan instructed me where the battalion was to be stationed. One company (F) was to occupy Garat Hadid with the mission of guarding the pass to the south. One platoon, Company "F", was to patrol this mountain and set up OP's. The rest of the battalion was to occupy defensive positions on the flat ground north of Garat Hadid with the mission of preventing the enemy from getting through the Garat Faid Pass.

February 7, 8, 1943.

Sunday, February 7, I was notified that the regiment, less the First Battalion would arrive in the Sidi Bou Zid area and that there would be a meeting of all Battalion and Company Commanders at the Regimental CP at 0800 hours, February 8. I with the Company Commanders arrived at the CP at 0800 hours and the Regimental Commander, Col. Drake, issued the following order to the following units of the regiment: Second Battalion, Third Battalion, Anti-Tank Company, 17th Field Artillery, Service Company and the 39th Combat Team Cannon Company attached, and one platoon of the 109th Engineers.

Contents of Col. Drake's order.

"We are to relieve the First Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry, the First Battalion, 26th Infantry, now on Dj Ksaira, by infiltration starting at 1300 hours. Guides from the 26th Infantry will be at your battalion areas at 1200 hours. Distance to move approximately five miles. Troops to be well distributed and well deployed so that they can hide in the cactus and holes in the ground in the event of aerial or artillery bombardment. Troops will carry a normal load of ammunition."

Third Battalion.

The Third Battalion will place one company on the left of Dj. Ksaira, facing Faid, one company on the right and in the foothills. One company in reserve on the right rear with the 81 MM mortars to cover the pass on the right and the pass on the left and to the front. A strong combat post to be established each night in the draw southeast of Dj. Ksaira, 60 MM mortars in the foothills. One platoon of heavy machine guns of the heavy weapons company in support with one section of machine guns with each front line company to cover the front and flank. Guards to be placed to protect the artillery OP on the highest point of Dj. Ksaira and to let no visiting dignitaries proceed to the main OP. Visiting dignitaries to be guided to an alternate OP.

Cannon Company.

The Cannon Company will move to the right rear southwest of Dj. Ksaira with the mission of manouevring in daylight to the northeast and northwest and to withdraw after darkness to a position in rear of the reserve company for rest.

17th Field Artillery.

Present position of the 33rd Field Artillery. The present position of the 91st Artillery is to the left of Dj. Ksaira five miles along the road to Faid Pass.

Second Battalion.

One company and one platoon of machine guns on the northeast of Garot Hadid, one rifle platoon and one section of heavy machine guns on the northeast nose covering the rear of the Third Battalion. One rifle platoon, the southeast slope of Garot Hadid, covering the mine field. One rifle platoon to hold and command the OP to the southwest of Garot Hadid, a distance of approximately four miles. One section of 37 MM anti-tank guns to cover the main roads through mine fields. One company to protect artillery on the left side of Sidi Bou Zid, Rebuou Road in the cactus patch and open ground to the front. One platoon and one section of light machine guns to move east of Poste de Lessouda for the protection of tanks and reconnaissance units in that area and to prevent enemy patrols along the road from Faid from damaging tanks and reconnaissance vehicles. Platoon to be alert at night and resting in the daytime. Remainder of the company less one platoon and one section of light machine guns in battalion reserve, generally in rear of artillery, as an additional measure in event of a break-through. Remainder of the Heavy Weapons Company (one section of 37 MM, one section of heavy machine guns and one section of 81 MM mortars) with reserve company. One quarter ton vehicle may be kept forward and dug in to be used for reconnaissance and supplies.

Service trains will be five miles southwest of Sidi Bou Zid.

Anti-Tank Company.

One platoon on the right side and one platoon on the left side of Dj. Ksaira and one platoon in rear of reserve company, Third Battalion. All guns to be dug in and camouflaged.

Engineers.

One engineer platoon, 109th Engineers, to mine and wire positions in front of platoon east of Lessouda and in front of Company in front of artillery.

Working parties to be furnished by companies concerned.

Standing pits to be dug by all men for firing to the front and flanks.

Slit trenches will be dug by all in the rear for sleeping purposes. All men

to stand to the front with one-half strength alert at night; the remain-

der resting. Units of fire carried in battalion trains to be shuttled forward. All feeding under cover of darkness. Kitchens will move forward under cover of darkness and will remain under guard in rear area of battalions. Carrying parties from rear areas to companies. Kitchen trains will clear Sidi Bou Zid before daylight. Individual mines to be carried by all personnel and to be used only when tank attack is imminent.

There is an armored battalion in reserve. Col. Drake issued instructions to all officers that no one would leave the line under fire. They would be ordered back to the line by an officer and if they disobeyed they were to be killed at once. "Teach all personnel to hate the Germans and to kill them at every opportunity. I will notify you when I want prisoners taken." Scout platoons will be assembled and used. The Second Battalion scouts to form patrols numbers 3 and 10. Number 3 patrol to cover road Poste de Soude to Faid Pass. Patrol number 10 to cover from Garot Hadid south to Dj el Bagra and Dj. Mezilla. Patrols were to go out at dusk and remain until one hour before dawn. They were to travel in one quarter ton vehicles to within three miles of the enemy lines, dismount and leave a guard on each vehicle and to go forward on foot. Missions of scouts of intercepting enemy patrols and to warn of an attack through Faid Pass or from the south through El Bagra and Dj. Mezilla Pass. (On the night of February 11-12, Lieut. Harrington, in command of scout platoon, was killed by a strong enemy patrol along the La Soude-Faid Road).

February 9, 10, 1943.

The battalion closed in to the new area at 1700 hours, February 8. The day of February 9 was spent in organizing the ground. On February 10, General McQuillan, accompanied by Lt. Col. Waters, of the 1st Armored Division, came to my CP and wanted to look over the defensive positions. At the general's suggestion, Company "E" was to be moved one mile farther forward. Companies "G" and the balance of Company "H" were to remain in position.

February 11, 12, 1943.

The afternoon of February 11, General McQuillan and Col. Drake again called at my CP and wanted to inspect positions. This time Company "E" was moved still farther forward from one-half to three-quarters of a mile with the platoons on line covering a mile front, and third, support platoon was to be placed about one-half mile in the rear of the front line platoons. At Col. Drake's suggestion a platoon of heavy machine guns, Company "H" was attached to Company "H". Company "G" was still to remain in its present position about a mile in the rear.

of the support platoon of Company "E". We were told that our positions would be wired in that night by the engineers placing single apron barbed wire entanglement with a trip wire, tin cans with rocks in them hanging on the trip wire in front, and that a mine field would be laid from the right flank of Company "E" to Dj. Keaira, a distance of about two miles. The next morning, February 12, I was called to General McQuillen's Headquarters and told that my battalion, less Company "E" and a platoon of heavy machine guns, of Company "H" would move at once, cross country to occupy Dj. La Souda, defending the escarpment to the north and east of Dj. La Souda. He also gave Captain Leger orders that had been handed down by General Ward that this OP would be held at all costs. The next day was spent in organizing the mountain. This meant that small groups had to be stationed at wide intervals due to the size of the mountain, with certain sections and in case of break-throughs, one platoon each of Companies "F" and "G" would be held mobile on the side of the mountain to be rushed to any place needed. One platoon Company "F" with one section of light machine guns were to relieve Company "G" east of Poste de Lessouada as Company "G" had the north sector of Dj. La Souda.

February 13.

At 2030 hours, February 13, I was called to Col. Waters' CP in a ravine on south slope of Dj. La Souda. Here he informed me to notify all companies that an attack was imminent at daylight, February 14, and gave instructions what each unit was to do. My battalion was to stay in position and hold Dj. La Souda.

February 14.

At 0600 hours, Sunday, February 14, enemy artillery started shelling the road junction at Poste de La Souda and a number of tanks were seen by our OP approaching Dj La Souda from Faid Pass. I tried to call Col. Waters' CP but could not get an answer. Soon it was noticed that these tanks, after over-running the artillery positions in front of Dj. La Souda and the platoon of Company "F" in front of Poste de La Souda, turned south and halted on either side of the Sidi Bou Zid-Poste de La Souda road in battle formation. At this time a large number of tanks and half-tracks were seen approaching from the east and southeast along with infantry. The tanks went around Dj. La Souda to the north. The infantry stopped along the line of Poste de La Souda and seemed to be milling around. At about 0700 hours, the reconnaissance group, commanded by Captain Dotson, were driven back into Dj. La Souda. He immediately reported to my CP and asked if they could be of any assistance. I had him set the two

75's in position to cover the mine field laid by Company "G" and guard the north pass entrance and that the light machine guns could be set up in place in Company "G" area, and to report to Captain Aggar for instructions. Captain Dotson also had one of his platoons lay a small mine field in a pass where vehicles or tanks might try to gain entrance. The one light tank Capt. Dotson also brought in with him was used to cover a pass that could only be used for foot troops to get through. Up to this time we had not opened fire on either of these, as we were still uncertain as to whether or not some of these troops might be our own. Upon seeing the tanks approaching along the east of La Souda and toward the north, Captain Aggar called and told me he had laid a mine field in the north pass, which was accessible entry for tanks to our positions, using, he said, over 300 mines. At 0900 hours Captain Sparks called from Faid in the direction of Mt. La Souda. I instructed him not to open fire until he could properly identify this column as enemy. When within 1500 yards, Captain Sparks called back and said he was sure that this column was enemy, possibly artillery. He was then instructed to open fire with the 81 MM mortars. This caught the enemy completely by surprise. Over 85 rounds were fired, all with devastating effect. Men were caught in their carriers and trucks and from the OP, it could be seen that many casualties were inflicted on the enemy, both in personnel and in material. At least 7 vehicles were damaged, 4 of them catching fire. About an hour later, Captain Aggar, of Company "G", called from his OP and said a column of four small cars and a motorcycle was approaching from the east up a ravine toward Dj. La Souda, but that he could not make out whether they were our own or enemy. After about 15 or 20 minutes he said he was sure the vehicles were enemy. I told him to open fire. At this time the vehicles were within 300 yards. All vehicles were destroyed and all occupants were either killed or captured. The captured prisoners (two officers and six non-commissioned officers) were identified as an artillery OP party. All were wounded except one officer. One officer had stomach wounds. These men were immediately turned into Battalion Headquarters, were questioned and first-aid was administered.

Company "F", which was responsible for the northern edge of the mountain, engaged the enemy who was trying to filter through up ditches and ravines. Company "F's men were successful in killing several enemy, wounding several others as well as taking three prisoners. The tanks at this time had come around the

north and east of Mt. Dj. La Soude and halted in a defiladed position on the western slope of the mountain.

After about half an hour these tanks (numbering between 70 and 75) started moving towards Poste de Lossouda, thence paralleling the road towards Sidi Bou Zid, following heavy tanks which had previously taken positions on either side of the Sidi Bou Zid-Poste de Lossouda Road, about a mile and a half southeast of Poste de Lossouda. In about 15 or 20 minutes, a tank battle took place somewhere in the vicinity of Sidi Bou Zid. In the meantime, 88 MM enemy guns had set up in positions previously occupied by one battery of the 91st Artillery in the ravine on the southern edge of Dj. La Soude, and Col. Waters' CP. Sporadic firing continued from enemy infantry but we could not tell where the fire was directed. There seemed to be an effort to infiltrate into our positions rather than any coordinated attack by the enemy.

About 1600 hours my CP received a heavy shelling by both artillery and 20 MM cannon fire. This CP had to be abandoned and new one set up. At this time we tried to contact Regimental Headquarters by radio but couldn't get through. Men were alerted for the night for I was sure that the enemy would try to infiltrate into our positions again. Several patrols from Companies "F" and "G" were sent out, but only a few of the enemy tried to get through. These were quickly disposed of.

February 15.

Monday morning, February 15, our positions was again shelled by artillery which kept up about every two hours all day long. At about 1000 hours one of the Medics came up to my CP and said that one of the German soldiers wanted to talk to me. This officer said that we were entirely surrounded and that he knew his comrades would come in and rescue him and wanted me to surrender. I did not even answer him, but immediately went back to the CP. The reconnaissance unit of the 1st Armored Division, under command of Captain Dotson, was in contact by radio with CCA and was informed to hold on, that help was coming. We were entirely surrounded by this time. We could see many foot troops north of us and tanks south and west of us. About 1530 hours we noticed a group of tanks approaching from the northwest towards our positions; this we figured were our own troops counter-attacking in order to let us withdraw. These tanks were not by the enemy south and west of Poste de Lossouda where the tank battle took place. In the meantime, six Mark VI tanks came up on the east side of Dj.

Lassouda and would attempt to surprise our tanks by flanking action. Captain Datson immediately contacted the tank commanders and informed them of this enemy activity. We could see a detachment of tanks breaking from the column to meet those Mark VIs.

After about two hours of battle, our tanks were driven off to the south and west. At dusk on Monday, a plane identified as an American P-40 flew over our positions and dropped a message. Contents of this message were as follows: TANK DESTROYERS AND INFANTRY WILL OCCUPY POSITIONS T-6363 AT 2200 HOURS TONIGHT TO COVER YOUR WITHDRAWAL. YOU ARE TO WITHDRAW TO POSITION TO ROAD WEST OF ELID CHEGAS WHERE GUIDES WILL MEET YOU. BRING EVERYTHING YOU CAN. SIGNED: GENERAL WARD.

I checked the coordinates on the map and found the place where we were to meet the guides at a distance of about nine miles. I immediately had Captain Datson radio to CCA for verification of the message, which was affirmed about an hour later. Our movement was to start at 2200 hours. Company Commanders were called and plans were made for our withdrawal. Company "F" was to lead, followed by Battalion Headquarters, Communication Section, Medics, Company "H" and Company "G". One platoon of Company "G" and one platoon of Company "F" were to stay in position until all the column was formed and the march began. All prisoners, including the walking-wounded, and litter cases were instructed that they were to be moved, even though they were wounded. They were prisoners of war and they had been instructed that if they made one false move or noise of any kind to attract enemy attention, that they would be bayoneted on the spot.

The order was for all men to walk in two files about one yard apart from front to rear and at least 30 yards between columns, but to make no effort to try to sneak through, that our best chance of getting out was to simply march right through their positions, as far as we could, before they could realize who we were. All equipment that had to be left behind would be destroyed and guns to be disassembled and the parts buried. All vehicles were to be left in such a way that they could not be used. Lieut. Oshio was detailed to supervise this precautionary measure. In case we were encountered by the enemy, we were not to fire, but to disperse and proceed individually or in small groups of twos or threes to a designated rendezvous. Our movement out of Dj La Soude started at about 2230 hours. Our route was southwest from our positions to the southwestern edge of the mountain, thence west, paralleling the Sbiotia-Poste de La

Souda road and a mile north of the road. As the head of the column reached the western edge of the mountains, we encountered a German 88 MM gun in position. We were so close to it that we could have easily reached out and touched it as we passed by. One of the gun crew got up and said something to us in German, then looked back at the column. I did not answer, nor did anyone else, and he must have thought we were part of his own troops. After watching us for a few minutes, the soldier lay back down by his own men. We continued for about a mile to where I could hear talking over to my left in a clump of trees and bushes at about the approximate position which our message had stated our covering force was to meet us.

I told Captain Ed. Reynolds that I was going over and contact this covering force and tell them that we were passing through. As I was walking in the direction of the clump of trees I noticed someone walking towards me, possibly thirty yards away. He called out something to me in German, but I did not answer, but circled back into the head of the column and told Captain Reynolds that it was a German-held position instead of our own covering force. Well, this was bad, but we continued on for about 100 yards and he again called out something in German. Since we did not answer this time either, they immediately opened fire with their machine guns on the head of our column. I gave the order for all men to scatter and to run like hell. The machine gun fire at this time was going over our heads and several more guns along the western slopes of Mt. La Soude commenced firing. After running for about 100 yards we had to hit the ground as their fire was beginning to fall upon us. About this time the fire on the head of our column suddenly stopped, and when I looked back, all the enemy guns were firing at the middle of the column. Then their mortars began firing at us in the front.

At this time Captain Sparks, realizing the confusing of the enemy, had his company follow him back of the German-held line, which was on down the road, thence west along the road to the crossroads where we were to meet the guides. When the fire shifted to Company "H", Captain Apgar of Company "G", moved his company down to the right about a mile north of the road thence to where we were to meet the guides. It was noticed by Lieut. Bates of the Communications Section who was in the center of the column, that several of our men had been hit by the enemy fire and he could see several of our men as they surrendered.

February 16.

At 0500 hours the next morning, February 16, Several members of Company "F" and I reached the crossroads where we met the guides from the 6th Armored Infantry. I immediately made a check up and found that we had 32 members of Company "F" who had previously reported. In about 15 minutes, Captain Sparks, leading Company "H", came down the road. Captain Apgar, with his company never reported until 1000 hours. The 6th Armored Infantry immediately transported us behind their lines to within about two or three miles east of Sbietla in a cactus patch, where I met Captain Potorman who immediately had a kitchen unit sent up and a hot meal was prepared for the men. Captain Potorman spent the entire day trying to get us blankets and overcoats. On the evening of February 16, we were ordered to untruck, using our own transportation and to proceed to a bivouac area north of the Kasserine Pass, arriving there, as we did, at about 2330 hours.

February 17.

On the morning of February 17, we were ordered to a new position southeast of Thala, where we bivouaced in a heavy timber. At this time the Regimental Trains with Captain Potorman and Captain Mann with what was left of the Service Company were with us.

February 18.

On February 18, we were ordered to Tebessa and were informed by G-3, II Corps, that we were being attached to the 895th Tank Destroyer Battalion, east of Tebessa, that was then in Corps reserve.

February 19.

The morning of February 19, Lt. Col. Gerald C. Linc, the Regimental Executive Officer, reported in, saying that to the best of his knowledge he was the only man of the Regimental Headquarters, Headquarters Company and Anti-Tank Company to get through. He also informed me that Company "E" of my battalion had been ordered by Colonel Drake to withdraw from their positions east of Sidi Bou Zid to Garret Hadid and to join the Regimental Headquarters Company.

Major Robert R. Moore, Commanding, 2nd Battalion, 168th Infantry.

Report of Activities of Third Battalion, 168th Infantry, from February
7 to February 20, 1943.

Map References.

All to sheet 78-4'9'' Tunisia (1:100000)

Sbiatla - 308732

Sidi Bou Zid - 643553

Faid - 803590

Mountains:

Ksaira - Occupied by Third Battalion and Anti-Tank Company, 168th Infantry.

Garet Hadid - Occupied by part of Second Battalion, Regimental Headquarters Company, 168th Infantry, Cannon Company, 39th Infantry, and various attached groups under command of Colonel Drake.

Dj Hanra.

February 8, 1943.

At 0900 hours attended a Company Commanders meeting at Regimental Headquarters, 168th Infantry, Col. Drake outlines positions and plans. Maps of the area as issued inadequate for a quick grasp of the situation. At 1100 hours Company Commanders, Third Battalion and Anti-Tank Company went on a reconnaissance of their positions with Col. Van Vliet. Positions were then occupied by another infantry organization. Third Battalion took over positions from them. Units of the Third Battalion started 7 mile march across country to positions to be occupied on Ksaira.

The scheme of defense was as follows: Company "I" use the highest part of the mountain; Company "L" in the center; Company "K" on the foothills and Anti-Tank Company was in general defense of the area.

At 1900 hours troops arrived and were led into positions. The evening was without incident. Ksaira is a mountain facing generally north in the shape of a horse shoe with the highest point to which Company "I" was assigned on the right. On the left the mountain falls into the plain in a series of foothills. The position occupied by the Third Battalion contemplated an enemy attacks from the direction of Faid. The natural line of attacks was around our left flank via the foothills. The first platoon, Company "K" with 1 section 30 MG attached was placed on the extreme left to protect our flanks.

February 9, 1943.

Digging in. Mines laid on likely avenues of tank approach. Wire was

already in position. Barbed wire for protective use was promised but never arrived. The 17th Field Artillery was located on the plain to our rear. A Captain, 17th Field Artillery estimated the enemy artillery as many 88's and two 210's.

February 10, 1943.

Spent in organizing positions. Shelling by artillery on artillery about 0800, 1300 and 0530 hours. No hot meals after this date. Water rationed to one canteen per man per day.

February 11, 1943.

The 17th Field Artillery moved into First Platoon, Company "K's" position on our left. This subjected the Infantry to enemy artillery shelling which formerly had been confined to counter-battery.

February 12, 1943.

The 17th Field Artillery shelled enemy positions on Faid for about an hour beginning at 0800. Shelling by our artillery and return fire from the enemy artillery at 1300 and 1800 hours.

February 13, 1943.

The 17th Field Artillery shelled enemy positions on Faid at 0800. Shelling by our artillery and return fire from the enemy artillery at 1300 and 1800 hours.

February 14, 1943.

The enemy shelled the 17th Field Artillery heavily at 0800. At 1100 hours part of the 17th Field Artillery left positions followed by part of First Platoon, Company "K". I immediately ordered them back, put Lt. Bingham in charge. In the shelling Company "K" lost Corp. Smith killed, and Sgt. Poken wounded as a result of a direct hit on their fox hole. The 17th Field Artillery left their positions at 1500 hours. At 1900 hours the Third Battalion consolidated their position on Ksnira by moving back into the hills. This move was without incident. We had no water or rations delivered after the night of February 13.

February 15, 1943.

All positions under heavy enemy shelling. This lasted all day. At 1400 hours Col. Van Vliet asked me to make plans to attack using Company "K" with one platoon .30 MG and one section .81 MM attached. I made plans. Col. Van Vliet later told me Col. Drake had disapproved the project. The enemy made no

infantry attacks that day. Company "K" was prepared for all round defense.

The Third Platoon covered the right, the Second the left and the First the rear, facing Garot Hadid. Company CP was in the middle. The enemy pulled up his vehicles in the flat between Ksaira and Garot Hadid, unlimbered his guns and shelled our men at will. We had no artillery to reply to him and he was out of range of our smaller weapons. The ration situation was bad. We had received none. I found a well in the rear of Company "K"'s position and water was drawn from this. Sometime during the day the information filtered down that we were surrounded. Morale was good. The men were not worried. But from day to day they weakened without rations and the shelling without some reply did them no good.

February 16, 1943.

From 0800 to 0900 hours we received very heavy enemy artillery and mortar fire. Enemy used 6 inch howitzers estimated from size of shell found. Shells coming over in bursts of threes. Pvt. Dorics wounded by shell fire at 1000 hours and Sgt. Jarvis wounded by sniper fire. Between 1100 and 1300 hours shelling lessened and enemy infiltrated into our positions on the right. Believed to have established a motor position in an Arab building. This building was shelled by our .37 MM guns with effect. Col. Van Vliet asked me to consider an attack on artillery on foothills of Ksaira. Said he would consult Col. Drake and ask permission to make this attack. This attack was never made. At 1500 hours a Company Commanders meeting was called at the Battalion CP. Constant shelling going on. Capt. Carlson, Company "L" reports hand to hand fighting to north of his position. Reports 7 men killed and wounded. Capt. Milligan, Company "I" reports small arms fighting to west of his position. At this meeting a plan was proposed to load the Battalion out and to Dj. Hamra. It was first proposed to go out in daylight. Col. Van Vliet insisted the attempt be made at night. After the conference the following was ordered: Order of withdrawal: One platoon of Company "K" to be left as a rear guard to withdraw on signal. Vehicles to be taken and used to carry wounded. Code word "Balloon" plus 3 hours. All equipment that could not be carried by men to be buried on receipt of code word. Col. Van Vliet told me he would determine which of Company "K"'s platoons would form the rear guard when he inspected my position. At 1700 hours Col. Van Vliet inspected routes of withdrawal. Ordered Third Platoon Company "K" to cover withdrawal. I called a Platoon Commanders meeting and gave them the information. At this time I commanded Lt. Hatch, Commanding Officer, 3rd Platoon for galkentry under fire, in commanding his platoon, and unquestionably obeying every order.

Code word "Balloon" received via phone from Lt. Casner, Adjutant, Third Battalion at 2044 hours. Actual message, which I verified was "Bust the balloon" at 2345. This gave us only one minute to bury equipment which was incompletely buried. It was then ordered to destroy vehicles. Tires were punctured with bayonets and the engines shot up. Blocks from 37 MM guns were buried. 30 MG and mortars were carried. Reason for delay in code word was that it took 1 1/2 hours to decode. Col. Drake message to evacuate at 2145. Company "K" was ready to move. I went to Battalion Headquarters to find the exact route. In the dark, Company "I" was separated. Company "I" was late. It was actually not until 2340 that the Battalion moved down a draw in the rear of CP in the order indicated. Movement began in column of 2's - 15 to 20 yards interval. It was a light cloudy night. The moon was full and broke through the clouds from time to time.

February 17, 1943.

About 0100 hours our enemy outpost was hit. There was a flurry of shots, an outbreak in foreign tongues and the column passed on. Fired signal for the Third Platoon, Company "K" to withdraw at 0100. From 0100 to 0300 hours the movement became very fast. The nose of Garot Hadid passed on. The course was over very rough ground with great dry watercourses. Then, the men weakened by several days of little food and water began to close up, to lose unity and to throw heavy equipment away. It became very hard to keep them from straggling, from making a noise and from throwing away weapons. About 0600 the column became broken. Some one in the line went to sleep during the break. I asked Col. Van Vliet to wait until I could find the rest of the column. I could not find it. About 200 men were with the Colonel at Battalion Headquarters. The rest of the group was from all companies. About 0630 Dj. Hamra seemed alone across the plain. Its foothills were covered by mist. I asked Col Van Vliet if he knew whether we were within our lines. He replied that he did not know. At 0700 the road in front of Dj. Hamra was plainly visible. I was with Col. Van Vliet and Capt. Milligan. We were trying to reform the column and prevent straggling. The men were strung out over a wide area. About half a mile from the road I observed a long column of vehicles. I said "these are not our vehicles". Col. Van Vliet examined them through his glasses. About this time small arms fire broke out a mile to our left. Three of our planes came over. I found one later shot down. They strafed a few minutes and went back. Small

cannon fire was opened on us. Col. Van Vliet said, "Sbiotla is to the south-east. That is our destination. Go back and find the rest of the column. I will be in this area". He then took concealment in a cactus patch. Firing on us became very heavy on the plain. Tanks and armored cars flanked us to our left. They did not close but stayed off about 400 yards and shelled us with what I judge to be 47 MM guns and machine guns. Flanks to the right and rear were also formed and shelled. We had no tank fighting equipment with us. The men had thrown it away the night of February 16-17. I saw a few numbers of enemy infantry who did not close but fired on us with small arms. At about 1100 hours I walked out of the firing range to the right and rear back in the direction of Faid Pass. I wandered about the flat until about 1600 hours. I never found the rest of the battalion column nor any trace of them. At about 1600 hours firing was still going on where I had left the Colonel. I was determined to get to Sbiotla to contact friendly troops. I waited till 1900 hours and then walked to the south and east of Dj. Hamra. There was firing all through the night. I walked into one post during the night about 2200 hours and threw 2 grenades into it. I worked by map sheet and compass course. I fell in with 2 soldiers from the Second Battalion, 168th Infantry and they came with me. We traveled by direct compass course through the mountains all night.

February 18, 1943.

At about 0800 hours we came out of the hills overlooking Sbiotla. Enemy tanks were observed going into town. About this hour a mixed group of 10 soldiers from all units came out of the hills. Every half hour I checked the course by compass. We, accordingly, by-passed Kasserine and set a compass course to the north and east. We traveled all night.

February 19, 1943.

Traveled all day in the mountains. The men were very weak and footsore. The travel was mostly up and down and was very weakening. At 2100 hours I found a way out toward the flat. One of the men spoke German. We met an Arab who spoke German and who had 2 brothers that were German prisoners. He was half Alsatian. For 1500 francs he guided our group around the mountain occupied by the Germans.

February 20, 1943.

At approximately 0800 hours we were picked up by a half-track Red Cross vehicle working with Combat Command Company. This vehicle took us to the rear.

I contacted a medical unit, and secured a ride to Tobessa where I saw Capt. Peterman, S-4, 168th Infantry. I secured transportation for the men, which never brought them up because of new movements. Capt. Peterman took me to Company "K". Company "K" moved several hours later and the 12 men did not find our unit until several days later. They all came in. The compass really brought us out, as we had only one map of part of the area. My information is that one man from Company "I" and one from Company "L" reached friendly troops after the Faid action. So far as I know all others at Ksaira who were there on February 16, are MIA.

The above facts on the action of the Third Battalion, 168th Infantry were reported by 1st Lt. Harry P. Hoffman, Commanding Officer, Company "K".

Report of Activities of the 168th Infantry in the Sidi Bou Zid Area,
February 14 - 17 1943.

The following report is on the activities of the 168th Infantry under the command of Colonel Thomas D. Drake, in the Sidi Bou Zid area, Tunisia, for the period of February. This report is based entirely on the memory of this Officer, while in the capacity of Special Service Officer, and is not substantiated by any written messages, orders, or original maps or overlays.

At 1400 hours on the 14th of February, Colonel Drake, commanding the 168th Infantry, sent me to General Ward's Headquarters with the following message: "Enemy surrounds Second Battalion (located on Mt. Lessouda) since 0730 hours this morning. Forty tanks known to be around them. Shelled, divebombed and tank attack. All artillery pulled out at 1300 hours, still trying to locate them. McQuillan's Headquarters pulled out at 1100 hours to southwest, did not notify except by message. Talked to McQuillan once by radio and he said help had been requested. Germans have absolute superiority, ground and air. Have stopped retreating TD unit and are attempting to hold my CP position. Unless help from air and armor comes immediately, Infantry will lose immeasurably."

I left the rear CP at 1400 hours and outskirted Sidi Bou Zid and went across country to the Sidi Bou Zid - Sbiotla road. Reached General Ward's Headquarters approximately 1700 hours and gave him the message, and other information regarding enemy tanks which I had seen. General Ward informed me that a battalion of tanks were being sent in on the 15th of February to make contact with the 168th Infantry and that Colonel Drake was being instructed to withdraw on the evening of the 15th.

The G-3, 1st Armored Division, told me to stay at the liaison officers tent and that I would remain there as a Liaison Officer. Information received during the afternoon of the 15th that the tank attack was going as scheduled and no additional help was needed. On the morning of the 16th February the part of the Second Battalion located on Mt. Lossouda was successful in withdrawing and returning to a bivouac area about four miles east of Sbictla. Information was also received that only 4 of the 54 tanks from the battalion which went in the attack returned.

During the period of February 16 - 18 General Ward assured me when I talked with him that everything possible was being done to aid the 168th Infantry and that food would be dropped by plane if they were not successful in withdrawing. However food was never dropped to the troops which were trapped.

A message was dropped by plane on the 16th, with instructions to Col. Drake about withdrawing. The last message which was received from Drake stated: "Besieged, good strength, good morale."

No details as to activities of the 168th Infantry is included in this report as other reports have been submitted covering the same.

The above facts of the action of the 168th Infantry were reported by 1st Lt. Marvin E. Williams, Special Services Officer.

Report of Activities of the 168th Infantry in the Sidi Bou Zid - Faid area February 14 - 17 1943.

The following report on the activities of the 168th Infantry, under the command of Colonel Thomas D. Drake, in the Sidi Bou Zid - Faid area, Tunisia, for the period of February 14 - 17, is submitted. This report is based entirely on the memory of this officer and is not substantiated by any written orders, original maps or overlays.

Dispositions of the 168th Infantry, February 14, 1943, 0700 hours.

First Battalion, 168th Infantry: In II corps reserve at Foriana.

Second Battalion, 168th Infantry, less Company "E" and one platoon of Company "H", Dj Lossouda (6765).

Third Battalion, 168th Infantry: Dj Ksaira (T-7651).

39th Cannon Company: Right rear of Dj Ksaira.

Anti-Tank Company, 168th Infantry: Supporting Third Battalion weapons platoons on both flanks.

Service Company, 168th Infantry, Sbictla.

Band, 168th Infantry: T-6753

Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 168th Infantry: T-6753

Platoon of Company "C", 109th Engineer Battalion: T-6654.

Company "C", 109th Medical Battalion: T-6052

Platoon of Battery "D", 443rd C.A. (AA): T-5752

Company "E", 168th Infantry and one platoon, HMG, Company "H": T-7354.

Note: All coordinates taken from Sheet 14, Sbietla, Tunisia,

1/200,000.

February 14, 1943.

About 0730 hours a report was received from the Second Battalion that enemy tanks were advancing on Dj. Lessouda, shortly afterward a member of a wiring party from Regimental Headquarters Company stationed at Poste de Lessouda reported that enemy tanks were shelling the road in his vicinity and advancing in his direction.

At approximately 0830 hours word was received at Regimental Headquarters that the Second Battalion, 168th Infantry, located in the vicinity of Dj. Lessouda, was completely surrounded by enemy tanks. This information was furnished by Headquarters, C.C.A. Colonel Drake reported that thirteen of our tanks were lined up along a road and being shelled by enemy artillery. This report was transmitted to G-3, C.C.A. and reply received that this was known but the reason for the immobility of the tanks was not. Later Colonel Drake reported that artillery units were abandoning their positions in apparent confusion. This information was passed on to G-3, C.C.A. and a reply received that the artillery was being moved on orders to protect the left flank from a tank attack.

At approximately 0930 hours a phone message was received at Regimental Headquarters from Headquarters C.C.A. saying that plans should be prepared for the withdrawal of the Third Battalion, that the situation did not call for that action immediately but to be safe and have a prepared plan. This information was passed on to Colonel Drake who then came back to the CP and talked to several members of his staff and to Lt. Col. Van Vliet, Commander of the Third Battalion. The Colonel's decision was for the Third Battalion to remain in position, as a daylight withdrawal appeared to be impossible, that the Headquarters and Headquarters Company would withdraw to Garret Hadid and take up a defensive position on that high ground.

Shortly afterward Colonel Drake talked with General McQuillan at C.C.A. Headquarters by telephone and announced this decision to the General, in event the situation warranted such action. At approximately 1100 hours the undersigned was talking by telephone to General McQuillan about the situation when the conversation was interrupted by the announcement "No more over the phone, we are leaving."

Colonel Drake was immediately notified and ordered that all units be notified at once to carry out his plan. The Headquarters Section Medical Detachment was ordered to start back to Garot Hadid at once but no communication could be secured with the train bivouac or Company "C", 109th Medical Battalion. The latter two units, as far as is known, never received any word of the retirement.

The Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 168th Infantry and the platoon from Company "C", 109th Engineers started to withdraw to Garot Hadid at approximately 1300 hours and the movement was completed by 1700 hours when the Band, 168th Infantry, which had remained as a covering force to the withdrawal, rejoined the units on Garot Hadid. Colonel Drake secured communication with Company "E" by telephone and found that they had received no orders from C.C.A. and that the artillery had not notified them of the artillery's movement from the area. Colonel Drake ordered Company "E" and the 39th Cannon Company to assemble with the other units on Garot Hadid, which they accomplished at about 1600 hours.

About this time it was learned that a company from the 16th Engineers, which had been assigned the mission of guarding a mine field across the Sidid Bou Zid-Macknassy road, was in the area and out off from its headquarters. It was also discovered that a platoon from the 81st Reconnaissance Company was present in this area.

Colonel Drake assumed command of all units on Garot Hadid and assigned defensive missions to each. The terrain formed somewhat of a horseshoe. Company "E", 168th Infantry was given two peaks to the right, when facing the road, of the CP as their sector; the 109th Engineers and the Company of the 16th Engineers were given the third high peak and the defense of the mine field as their mission. The Headquarters Company, 168th Infantry was given the high ground to the left, or on the Sidi Bou Zid side as its sector. The 81st Reconnaissance Platoon was given the mission of defending the approach into the position from the

direction of the Sidi Bou Zid-Maknassy road. The Cannon Company to support this defense.

A Regimental CP was established on the high peak to the left of the CP and was manned by personnel from the S-2 section. No hostile activity was encountered or observed during the afternoon of February 14 or the night of February 14-15. Enemy operations started against our position about 0730 hours February 15 and continued in different sectors during the day. At one time a force of approximately two hundred enemy infantry penetrated the position of the 16th Engineers but were later forced to withdraw when counter-attacked with hand grenades by this unit. Mortar and artillery fire was intermittent during the day and about 1630 hours two tanks and two trucks were observed approaching Garot Hadid from Sidi Bou Zid.

Shortly afterward these two tanks entered the dry waddi leading into the position and over-ran the positions occupied by the 81st Reconnaissance Platoon. The accompanying trucks unloaded infantry personnel, who following the tanks started to advance into the position. Two light machine guns manned by members of the Band, 168th Infantry, immediately took the advancing infantry under fire and drew quite heavy gun fire from the tanks. Bandmen armed with rifles supported the machine-guns during the action. Because of this fire the enemy infantry was unable to advance and the two enemy tanks withdrew after destroying by gun fire all vehicles of the 81st Reconnaissance Platoon. Enemy artillery fire destroyed two of the Cannon Company vehicles during this action.

After the withdrawal of the enemy the position was subjected to long range artillery and mortar fire until dark. It was reported by the Captain commanding the 16th Engineer unit that the Engineers had succeeded in knocking out six enemy vehicles in their sector during the day. Two of these vehicles were reported as being self-propelled gun mounts. No enemy activity was noted during the night. A report was received via radio from the Third Battalion that enemy troops numbering approximately three hundred had occupied the lower part of the Ksjar ridge and were being contained in this area and subjected to mortar fire. During the day contact by radio was maintained with C.C.A. and several requests were submitted for air action against observed enemy movements and material. One request gave accurate coordinates on the location of known enemy artillery positions but no action was taken by our air force. Radio contact with C.C.A.

was lost during the night due to atmospheric conditions.

February 16, 1943:

Enemy activity started about 0700 hours after a quiet night. Mortar shelling was very heavy during the morning on the positions held by Company "E". Enemy infantry were active on the flank held by the 16th and 109th Engineers and during the afternoon penetrated into part of this flank position forcing one platoon of the 16th Engineers to retire. During the day enemy infantry attempted to force their way in from the rear but were held up by the defense maintained by members of the Band. Twelve members of the Band were stationed in groups of four on three hills that overlooked the approaches into the main position from the southwest. These groups were in action all day against groups of enemy armed with machine guns and mortars. At about 1400 hours the group on the hill to the right received a strong attack and were forced to retire, leaving two men dead. These men were killed by hand grenades thrown into the position by the enemy. A sniper was able to find a position by which he could fire down the draw in which the CP was located, thus handicapping the activities to some extent.

At approximately 1500 hours several vehicles, identified as two half-tracks and two three-quarters ton trucks, all American vehicles, approached the position from Sidi Bou Zid. A runner in American Army uniform came up the draw to our message center and told the personnel there not to fire on the vehicles as they were American. The runner then returned to the vehicles. Lt. Rogers 91st Field Artillery and myself investigated the report and discovered that the first half-track had six men, all in American uniform, for a crew but that the remaining vehicles contained men in German uniform. Fire was opened on these vehicles and they withdrew to a large cactus patch where observation was lost. At intervals small groups of men could be seen engaged in what appeared to be the mounting of machine guns along the edge of the cactus and the road.

Shortly about 1500 hours a message was received by radio from C.C.A. to this effect: "Fight your way out--Time and place yours--Air cover will be provided--Instructions will be dropped by plane this afternoon". At approximately 1630 hours a flight of our planes came over and our panels were displayed but they continued on to Ksaira where they dropped the message in the Third Battalion area. The message was relayed to Regimental Headquarters about 1730 hours.

The contents of this message is not remembered but a code for use of map coordinates is known to have been part of the message. No definite location for forming a junction with our forces was given.

Colonel Drake called in the unit commanders at 1830 hours and gave them the order for withdrawal. Destruction of all equipment possible without the use of fire was ordered. Parts from motor vehicles were to be taken off and destroyed; radios were to be smashed by hammers.

The order of withdrawal was; 81st Reconnaissance Platoon to lead followed by the Band, 168th Infantry; Regimental Headquarters and Headquarters Company; Medical Detachment; 39th Cannon Company; Company "E"; 109th Engineer Platoon; and the Company of the 16th Engineers. Move to start at 2200 hours, all units leaving positions at that time.

Route of march: Around the northeast nose of Garot Hadid, then back along the foothills to the southwest for about five miles and then a northwesterly direction to Dj. Hanra where the units would stop during the day. Light machine guns and 60 MM mortars to be carried. Time, route and equipment were communicated to the Third Battalion with orders to follow behind the 16th Engineer unit. One medical enlisted man was left with the wounded at the aid station.

The move started at 2150 hours at which time all units, except the 39th Cannon Company and the Engineer units, were assembled in the vicinity of the Command Post. The withdrawal was accomplished without incident but for one burst of machine gun fire about 2210 hours from the direction of Ksaira, on our right flank. The absence of the 39th Cannon Company was unexplainable and their whereabouts was unknown. It was thought by Colonel Drake that they had left before the time set and were ahead of the column.

The route of march was followed during the night; the first part of it over very rough ground and the last part mostly over cultivated fields. The pace was rather rapid and very few halts were taken. As a result, during the night men carrying the light machine guns and mortars discarded their loads along the route.

February 17, 1943.

Daylight found the column about five miles from Dj. Hanra and on Colonel Drake's orders the units were split into two columns with fifty yards distance

between. The march continued and about 0730 hours, when the head of the column was approaching the T-6050 road, three planes (Allied) flew overhead and one plane fired into a column of enemy trucks that were moving northeast along this road. The truck column split and about twenty of the leading trucks continued while the other part remained halted along the road. The planes continued on and never returned to that vicinity. Enemy infantry began de-bussing and took up positions along our left flank about a thousand yards away. Our column continued to move slowly towards the road and the head of it reached the road at the same time a quarter-ton truck (American make) came down the road headed to the southwest.

I stopped the truck and motioned for the two German soldiers to get out. This truck still carried all of the American markings but had a small white pennant with red markings fastened to the radiator. I told two men to get in and drive the truck away and for the others to march the prisoners along with us. About this time the enemy force with the trucks opened machine gun fire on our troops. Our men started moving to the right and some crossed the road and moved towards a cactus patch ahead and to the right. Machine gun and mortar fire became quite heavy in this area which caused the men to become scattered over a large area. Very little cover was available in this large, open field. An enemy armored car took up position directly ahead of our direction of march and from position defilade opened machine gun fire across the field. This armored car was joined by a truck load of infantry who also set up a machine gun at this point and opened fire.

The group of men which had crossed the road worked their way to the cactus patch and were lost from my sight. The enemy armored car and infantry advanced to the northern edge of this cactus patch and continued to fire for about an hour. Later the firing ceased and I changed my position to the left about five hundred yards, from where I could look back over the field on the southeast side of the road (T-6050). At that time I noticed a column of about one hundred men lined up on the road and started marching to the north, also that four tanks were posted at four corners of this field.

That is the last that I saw as I was under observation from the road and the traffic was very heavy. Later in the day an enemy vehicle came thru the area I was in twice forcing me to keep under cover. I made my way back to the Kasserine-Thala road and secured a ride back to Tobossa and remained at the

48th Hospital. I reported to G-1, II Corps, by phone that night and in person the next afternoon. No questions were asked of me and I was sent to the Second Battalion, 168th Infantry, then stationed southwest of Tabessa.

It is not known what records and equipment were destroyed upon the withdrawal from Garet Hadid but it is felt that some important information and equipment fell into enemy hands at that place and at the point where our troops were captured.

An account of the withdrawal of the Third Battalion, 168th Infantry has been submitted by 1st Lt. Harry P. Hoffman, the only officer to return from that battalion.

The above facts of the action of the 168th Infantry at Sidi Bou Zid were reported by Lieutenant Colonel Gerald C. Linc.

Activities of the First Battalion from February 8 to March 1, as taken from the record events of the First Battalion are as follows:

On February 8, the First Battalion arrived at Fariana at 0300 hours, where the battalion was placed under the direct command of the 26th Infantry. A bivouac area was selected and the unit "dug in". Major Gillospio returned from the hospital on February 9 and assumed command of the battalion, relieving Capt. Conaway. A defensive position in the immediate vicinity of Fariana was selected and occupied.

From February 10 to 15 the battalion remained in these positions without incident. On February 12, Lt. Col. John C. Potty died at the Field Hospital then located at Fariana. The battalion received orders to withdraw on February 16 and abandoned the stone quarry one mile from Fariana to take up a newly selected defensive position. On February 17, the battalion withdrew at 0400 hours going back towards Tobessa. This withdrawal was covered by Company "O" which remained in position until 1100 hours when advance German Panzer units forced their withdrawal. Heavy enemy artillery fire was received on the position and the withdrawal was begun over very difficult terrain. Due to able leadership and the intelligent use of terrain, the withdrawal was executed without loss. Much credit for the successful withdrawal was due to an Arab guide who volunteered his services to the Company Commander. The defensive position selected was along high ground about thirty miles southwest of Tobessa, being generally along the Algerian-Tunisian border.

During the day of February 18, work continued on the organizing of the defensive position. The battalion was placed under command of the Constantine Division of the French force, then in that vicinity. From February 19 to 28 the battalion remained on these positions without any unusual incidents. Mail was received on the 25th of February--the first mail in over more than a month's time. On February 26, the battalion sent a cadre of non-commissioned officers to the regiment for the purpose of reorganizing the Third Battalion. On March 1, the battalion moved out at 0700 hours and rejoined the regiment during the afternoon of the same date, near Ain Bidna.

Following the battle of Faid Pass, the regiment was down in strength to 72 Officers and 1890 Enlisted Men. The following organized units remained available for duty: The First Battalion consisting of Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, Companies "A", "B", "C" and "D". The Second Battalion at this time had Headquarters Detachment, Companies "F", "G" and "H". The Service Company was complete less small detachments which were lost with the Second and Third Battalions. At this time the First Battalion was detached from the Regiment and operating to the south of Tobessa, under control of the French. Major Robert R. Moore had assumed command of the Regiment in the absence of Col. Drake and turned the command over to Lt. Col. Lino on February 20. Lt. Col. Lino had rejoined the Regiment after spending three days and nights walking from Sidi Bou Zid to Tobessa and reported the capture of the Regimental Headquarters, Headquarters Company, Anti-Tank Company, Cannon Company 39th Infantry, Company "E" with a platoon of Company "H" attached, and the platoon from Company "C" of the 109th Engineers and Company "C" 109th Medical Battalion. Licut. Hoffman reported into the regiment on February 20 and gave the information that the Third Battalion had been captured during the withdrawal from the Sidi Bou Zid area.

On the night of February 20-21, orders were received by telephone from G-3, II Corps to move from the present area to one located between Ain Bidna and Meskiana. This move was started at about 0130 hours and was completed at 0700 hours. The 5th Replacement Center, located in the adjoining area, provided tent shelters for quartering most of the men and all the units present moved in during the day of February 21. On the morning of February 22, Field Order No. 2 from Headquarters II Corps was received from G-1, II Corps, to

move to a bivouac area located two miles west of Montesque (N-0156). This move was started at 1430 hours and was completed at 1800 hours. On February 23, G-1 of the II Corps gave orders for the regiment to move to the east of Montesque about eight miles (N-1164), in which area the regiment remained until February 27. The reorganization of the regiment was started during this period and supplies and equipment which could be provided were issued. Officers from the two battalions were selected to command and reorganize those units that were completely missing. These units included Regimental Headquarters Company, Anti-Tank Company, Company "E" and all units of the Third Battalion.

On February 24, Col. F. B. Butler was assigned to command the 168th Infantry by II Corps and assumed command on that date. Also on this date, pay for the month of January was received by the officers and men present. On February 26, the complete casualty report and a requisition for 1,645 replacements was submitted to G-1 of the II Corps. Verbal orders were received by Col. Butler from II Corps to move to an area located near Ain Baida on February 27. On February 27, this move was started at 1230 hours and completed at 1800 hours. Units located in the vicinity of M-8323, sheet 28, 1:200,000. Vicinity of Ain Baida. Verbal orders were received by Col. Butler to reorganize the regiment under the Tables of Organization of April 1941.

During the day of February 28, four groups of replacements were received from the 5th Replacement Center located in this area. On this date, a total of 39 officers and 904 enlisted men were transferred into the regiment. These replacements came from the 7th and 15th Infantries and were all well trained and equipped. Major Babcock and Captain Ludwick reported for duty and were assigned as Commanding Officer, Third Battalion and Regimental Surgeon, respectively. These two officers were transferred from the 133rd Infantry on 34th Division orders.

Four men from units lost in the Sidi Bou Zid area reported to Regimental Headquarters on this date. T-4 Warren Routh, of Headquarters Company, Pvt. Owens of the Band and Pvt. Au, Pvt. S. Janousky of Company "F" were the four who reported back at this time. On March 1, 295 replacements, the majority coming from the 15th Infantry, were received from the 5th Replacement Center. Church services were held for units of the regiment and as Chaplain Kenneth L. Amos was the only chaplain with the regiment, a combined service for all faiths was held.

Lessouda Force, 1st Armored Regiment, History
(Extract), 13-17 February 1943

10 March 1943.

C E R T I F I C A T E

1. In the morning of February 13, 1943 I was informed that Lt. Col. John L. Waters was in command of all the forces holding the sector, north from the Abaita-Paid road to the Dj ez Zaouia and Dj el Feundi range of mountains. Upon visiting Col. Waters headquarters he talked with me about the disposition of my company and instructed me to report to his headquarters the following morning at 0930 hours. This meeting took place at approximately 1030 hours on the morning of February 13, 1943.

2. At approximately 2300 hours February 13, 1943 I was called to Col. Waters Headquarters again and informed of an expected attack from enemy forces in the Paid area. We discussed again the disposition of my platoons and we decided to move the third platoon of my company to a new location. He also talked of the listening posts I had out and he told me of the location of a listening post in front of Paid Pass which was manned by a platoon of the 163rd Infantry. He showed me on the map the disposition he intended to make of the artillery and tank forces, which were in his command, prior to daylight the following morning. In my estimation his plan was set up for a good all around defense and could have repelled an attack from an enemy force anywhere near the size of Col. Waters command. I then returned to my company headquarters which was located on the north end of Lessoude mountain, and at 0430 hours on the morning of February 14, 1943, alerted my company and changed the location of my 3rd platoon as I had been instructed to do so. At 0600 hours I visited one of my observation points and warned them to be particularly alert. At approximately 0700 hours Captain James Fraser called me by radio and asked if I had anything to report. I told him I didnt and he then told me they were being attacked by tanks and a heavy concentration of artillery fire. I returned to my C.P. and at approximately 0730 hours discovered a force of 30 to 40 M-IV tanks accompanied by what appeared to be half tracks, a total of 70 vehicles in all moving at about 30 mph around my left flank. I reported this to Col. Waters and to CO "A". The car commander of the radio track from my company who was attached to Col. Waters headquarters had been ordered by Col. Waters to move out of the bivouac area, however he left his track and went back in an effort to find Col. Waters but was informed by an officer that Col. Waters and Major Parsons had gotten in a tank and gone off somewhere, he gave his report to an artillery captain that was at Col. Waters headquarters. From this time on I had no communication with him as the tank attack I reported had gone completely around Dj Lessoude and was between the radio track and the headquarters.

Fredrick W. Dodson Jr.
FREDERICK W. DODSON JR.,
Capt., 1st Armored Regiment

Subscribed and sworn before me this tenth day of March 1943.

William L. Strickland
WILLIAM L. STRICKLAND,
Major, 1st Armored Regiment,
Summary Court.

HEADQUARTERS FIRST ARMORED REGIMENT
APO 251, New York City

11 March 1943

C E R T I F I C A T E

In compliance with orders from the Commanding General II Corps, on 11 February 1943, a force known as the Lessouda Force, was organized as indicated below, and put under command of Lieut Colonel John K. Waters, Executive Officer, 1st Armored Regiment. Previous to the receipt of this order a mobile force, only had been kept in this area under the command of Major Norman W. Parsons, Executive Officer, 3rd Battalion, 1st Armored Regiment.

LESSOUDA FORCE

2nd Bn 168th R.C.T. reinf (less Co "E")
Co "G", 1st Armd Regt
Reconnaissance Co, 1st Armd Regt (plus pl Maint Co light tanks)
Battery "B", 91st Field Artillery
1 heavy pl Co "A", 701st Tank Destroyer bn

The mission given the Lessouda Force was to occupy, organize, and defend a position on the high ground in the vicinity of Dj Lessouda and to prevent hostile forces from debouching west of Dj Kralif - Dj Gadoum Mountains.

The 91st Field Artillery Battalion (less Btry "E") had a normal zone Faid Pass to Rj-T 7945 and this was also the contingent zone of the 17th Field Artillery Battalion. In addition, the 91st Field Artillery reconnoitered for immediate occupation, positions from which to execute defensive fires in the western exits of the pass between Dj el Akrouta and Dj Si Kralif (5 miles north of Faid).

Lt Col Waters reconnoitered the position in conjunction with Major General Orlando Ward and Brigadier General Raymond E. McQuillin, and made immediate dispositions of his troops in accordance with his plan and mission. Engineers were made available to him and defensive positions laid out for the infantry. Part were constructed by the engineers and part by the infantry. It was decided to hold the tanks, destroyers, and artillery mobile, with night positions within the defensive area. The reconnaissance company was to operate from the boundary of CC "C" on the north to the pass 5 miles north of Faid, inclusive, with night listening posts covering dangerous passes. Patrols from the 2nd Bn 168 RCT were to execute raids and establish listening posts opposite Faid Pass during hours of darkness and to outpost the position. During daylight hours the area between Faid and Lessouda being an open plain, was under the surveillance of both sides. However, the tank company and destroyers moved prior to daylight to cover this plain and varied their formations and patrols from day to day in this area. They withdrew under cover of darkness to the defensive position. The battery of artillery occupied positions at night to support the defensive position, and had positions reconnoitered to which they could move to support the tanks. It was

contemplated that in the event of an attack, the Lessouda Force would block the hostile forces, while the mobile reserve under Lt Col. Hightower counterattacked. Seven possible counterattacks had been planned and discussed with the force commanders. A combined Artillery - Infantry O.P. was established on top of Jb Lessouda with telephone wire to Lt Col Waters' C.P. and to the CC "A" C.P. This was supplemented by radio, messenger, and prearranged Very Pistol signals.

During the afternoon of 13 February 1945, an observer in the O.P. on Jb Ksiara spotted hostile vehicles moving south on the road east of Dj Kretchem. This was made an air request mission. The size of the movement indicated a large force in motion toward Macknassy. During the night listening posts from Jb Ksiara reported noise of tank motors to the east. A strong wind from the north-west prevented accurate location. However, prior to dark the returning air units reported some tanks east of Rebaou.

All units were alerted and ordered to be prepared for an attack and to be especially watchful prior to daylight. Lt Col Waters was directed to establish an additional listening post facing Faid with radio and 1/4 ton truck messenger service available to it.

Lt. Col Waters visited the C.P. about 21:30 hours and he and General McQuillin and I discussed the problems facing him and the disposition of his forces. When he left we were in accord on all matters. He left in good spirits and being old friends we exchanged a few friendly remarks before he departed. I had previously made all of my regimental staff available to him. He had agreed on Captain James G. Freer, assistant S-3, who had had considerable experience as a communications officer, as best suited to his needs. However, I again offered additional staff and vehicles for command, which he declined, saying "Pete, if I need them I'll ask you for them."

There were no alarms during the night but at 06:35 hours, by my watch, I heard gun fire in the direction of Faid. I called Lt Col Waters and he reported that a battle had started on the plain between Lessouda and Faid, apparently between our tanks and hostile tanks. He said the light was too bad to see what was going on but that he could not contact Major Parsons, who was with the tanks and he feared his radio had been knocked out. Survivors of "C" Company later substantiated the fact that Major Parsons's tank was hit and destroyed early in the battle. At about 07:15 hours Waters called me and stated that about 20 German Mk IV tanks were at Poste De Lessouda, that the tank battle was still obscured in smoke and dust and that he had not been able to contact Major Parsons. I informed him that the mobile reserve under Lt Col Hightower had been alerted and was moving toward Lessouda to counterattack.

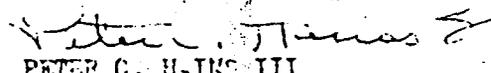
A little later in the morning Waters called again to report infantry in trucks detrucking east of Lessouda out of artillery range, that the tank battle seemed to have stopped, that "C" Company could not be located and there seemed to be a hostile movement north of Lessouda.

At about 0900 hours Captain Fraser called by radio, as we had disconnected the telephone lines to Poste De Lessouda when the Germans over ran that place. He reported 39 German Mk IVs and some Mk VIs moving south, from an area just west of Lessouda. I asked for a verification which he got from the O.P. and again reported 39 Mk IVs. He stated that Lt Col Waters had gone to the O.P. I informed him of our situation and relayed his information to Lt Col. Hightower. At about the same time Lt Col Hightower reported 4 Mk VI tanks among those between him and Lessouda. He was engaging the enemy with his battalion less "G" Company and supported by the 91st Field Artillery less "E" Battery, over run by hostile tanks.

About this time B Battery was reported to be ~~not~~^{at}

Just before noon Lt Col Waters called me and said "Pete, I'm going to shut this thing off and go up on the O.P. They are all around here and looking at me now, but I don't think they have discovered this halftrack yet. If I keep on operating they will. I will destroy it before they get too close. If I keep away they won't find it as it is well hidden and I may be able to contact you again." I answered him to the effect that I approved of his plan and told him to hold on till dark and then try to get his people out under cover of dark. We had prearranged our next delaying position west of Lessouda. Waters replied "Never mind about me. Just kill these bastards at the bottom of this hill." I told him I would do all I could to comply with his request and he signed off. At about 14:30 hours a message came in for me from Waters. I was out near the tank battle and did not receive it until about 15:00 hours. We were unable to contact him again nor were we able to contact him through our Reconnaissance Company radio net.

I have known Lt Col Waters for a number of years and we were fast friends. I know that in all his actions he was a courageous and gallant officer. I have already recommended him for a Distinguished Service Cross for exceptional bravery in a previous action. In this action he was hopelessly outnumbered but he continued to try to accomplish his mission with every means at hand. His calmness under fire, his personal leadership regardless of danger and his unshaken courage and devotion to duty permitted the evacuation of his troops under cover of darkness on the night of 15-16 February with very small losses. He is deserving of the highest praise and a living example of the motto of his Alma Mater "Duty Honor Country".


PETER C. HAINS III
Colonel, 1st Armored Regiment
Commanding.

SWORN AND SUBSCRIBED TO BEFORE ME THIS 12 DAY OF March, 1943.


WILBUR L. STRICKLAND
Major, 1st Armored Regiment
Adjutant.

Commander, 168th Infantry, Report (Extract), 7-
17 February 1943

22. 6 February 1943 - Saturday - After a hazardous all night march the regiment, less one battalion, passed SBKITLA and bivouacked in the open desert, depending on dispersion for protection from enemy bombers. Men and vehicles were dug-in. At 1500 hours the Corps Chief of Staff, visited the command with orders for the First Battalion to move to SIDI BOU ZID at dark to relieve a French Battalion. Protest was made to a particular unit being designated, whereupon the order was changed to "send a battalion". The first Battalion had suffered very heavily in casualties during the battle of SEMED with approximately 20% casualties inflicted on them. Request was also made again at this time for the 175th Field Artillery Battalion, but instead orders were issued that the Seventeenth Battalion of Corps, medium artillery would be sent forward to join the regiment, because they had to have artillery at GAFSA and the exchange would save moving the two units. However, promise was made that the 175th Field Artillery would be sent forward within a few days to rejoin its Combat Team.

23. 7 February 1943 - Sunday - Orders were received attaching the Regiment to the First Armored Division and for Colonel Drake to report to Major General Orlando Ward for orders. General Ward issued orders for the command to move to SIDI BOU ZID that night and there report to Brigadier General McQuillin, Combat Command A; that the Third Battalion, 168th Infantry from ALGIERS would join the Regiment on the move forward and that upon reaching there the 17th Field Artillery would revert to General McQuillin; that the First Battalion, 168th Infantry would move that night back to FERRIANA in Corp Reserve. After issuing the necessary orders for the movement Colonel Drake went forward to SIDI BOU ZID and reported to Brigadier General McQuillin. General McQuillin ordered him to complete his movement that night and to relieve Colonel Alexander N. Stark, commanding 26th Infantry, First Infantry Division, the next day. That night the remainder of the Combat Team, less the First Battalion, and with the Seventeenth Field Corp Artillery moved forward and came under long range of enemy artillery fire as they neared SIDI BOU ZID. However, the movement was completed into position without confusion.

24. 8 February 1943 - Monday - In early morning Colonel Drake went on reconnaissance of position with General McQuillin, who selected positions into which the units would move. Arriving back at the C.P., 26th Infantry, at 1000 hours orders were issued for the relief of the 26th Infantry by Colonel Drake and movement into position for the other

units. Daylight relief was made necessary by orders that the 26th Infantry must be relieved by 1700 hours, that day, as it was reverting to the Corp Reserve. By dispersion and taking advantage of vegetation and folds in the ground, the movement forward was made and the relief completed by 1900 hours.

25. For the next five days, the ninth to the thirteenth, inclusive, the time was spent in consolidating the positions, putting up wire entanglements, laying the mines and shifting of units. On the eleventh of February a typewritten order was received by General McQuillin, signed by the Corp Commander, Major General Fredendall, directing the exact location and disposition of each organization. General Ward had written on the margin of this order in pencil, "Show this to Drake." The order follows:

The Second Battalion, less Company E, with two platoons of Company H attached, was placed at DJ LESSOUDA, eight miles north of the city of SIDI BOU EID and by General McQuillin's orders directly under the command of Lt. Colonel John K. Waters, First Armored Division; Company E, with two platoons of Company H, were placed with the Armored Artillery as local protection. He further directed that the Third Battalion would garrison DJ. KSAIRA and would be under the direct orders of General McQuillin; that Colonel Drake would command the Service Company and Headquarters Company; that the 17th Field Artillery would be attached to his Artillery and he would issue orders to it. Orders were also issued that the ground must be defended to the last man.

Each night patrols were made into the German lines on call from higher headquarters and prisoners captured and sent back. Some casualties were suffered during these patrols. On the twelfth General Ward sent forward instructions that Colonel Drake would command the Infantry. Upon delivering these orders to Colonel Drake, General McQuillin stated that the Second Battalion would remain under Lt. Colonel Waters at DJ. LESSOUDA and that any orders Colonel Drake saw fit to issue to the Third Battalion would be submitted to him for approval.

26. On Friday night the 12th of February replacements were received at the front. A total of 450 having been sent forward to the regiment, 250 of whom had been dropped off at the First Battalion in FERRIANA and the remainder coming on forward to SIDI BOU ZID. These replacements arrived, part of them without arms of any kind and all carrying two heavy barracks bags of clothing. The roster that accompanied them did not have all of their names on it, but it did contain names of men who were not present. Upon questioning these men it was found that a great many had never fired a rifle in their life. That none of them had entrenching tools, nor bayonets and some were without rifles. Many of them were medical corp men, artillery men, tank destroyer men and everything except infantrymen. These men were sent to the different companies throughout the day and had joined their companies for the attack which came Sunday morning.

That night six truck loads of "bazookas" and their accompanying ammunition was received. Distribution of these guns and rockets were made Saturday, but due to lack of time for instruction they were useless. Every effort had been made to get just one "bazooka" in the regiment for instructional purposes, but without success. They had been systematically forwarded to front line outfits where they were just as religiously thrown away.

27. 13 February 1943 - Saturday - During the afternoon an observer in the outpost on DJ. KSAIRA spotted hostile vehicles moving south on the road east of DJ. KRETCHEM. The size of the movement indicated a large force in motion toward MACKNASSY. During the night

listening posts on DJ. KSIARA reported noise of large tank formations in our front to the east.

Later that afternoon Colonel Drake issued orders to the Service Company that all heavy trucks of the 168th Infantry would be moved to SBEITLA at dark that night to go into bivouac there, and that a Quartering party would be sent out by infiltration that afternoon to prepare for their reception. Heavy enemy activities was observed in front of the position throughout the day and it appeared as though an attack was imminent. Orders were issued for breakfast at 0400 hours and to "Stand To" at 0500 hours the next morning. At 2350 hours a telephone call came through to the Regimental C.P. for Colonel Drake to report to the C.C.A.C.P. There he met General Eisenhower, the Allied Commander-In-Chief, who presented to him the Silver Star Medal for the action at SENEZ.

28. 14 February 1943 - Sunday - The enemy attacked at 0630 hours with two divisions of Panzers, the 10th and 21st. The German Group Commander of the Panzer Divisions was General Schmidt. The enemy first hit DJ. Lessouda with two battalions of tanks, one from the north and one from the east. The heavy north westerly wind had been blowing all night, during which the tanks moved up in the face of the wind without their noise being detected. Patrols had been ordered out every night by higher authority, in spite of the fact that there was but a restricted sector to patrol in the front. It was obvious to anyone that the enemy could locate the patrols and grab them at any time that they might wish to do so. One patrol stationed near FAID PASS on Saturday night was never heard of afterwards. Outside of one or two patrols to capture prisoners, it appeared that the patrols were unnecessary. Quite often most of them were killed, as the Germans would lie in wait for the patrols after the first couple of nights. Coming from the north and the east the two forces of German tanks closed on DJ. LESSOUDA. Through his field glasses Colonel Drake counted eighty-three German tanks in front of DJ. LESSOUDA. At daylight there were flashes of gun fire from the two German forces direct on the position. This almost instant action destroyed all seven of the American tanks with Lt. Colonel Waters. There were a few pieces of armored artillery which were knocked out at the same time. One company of infantry out on the desert dug-in in front of DJ. LESSOUDA was immediately overrun. What became of the infantry in those holes was never known, though two or three men from that company said that the men could be seen lying in the fox holes and the enemy tanks would put a track in the fox hole, turn around on them and crush the soldier into the ground. The remainder of the battalion was back in the hills just outside of DJ. LESSOUDA and later, under Major Moore, about half of them got through to the American lines.

29. Combat Command Headquarters was in SIDI BOU ZID, while the 168th Infantry CP was a mile and half farther east in a small olive grove. The Third Battalion of the 168th Infantry and the 17th Field Artillery were at DJ. KSAIRA, about four and one-half miles farther east. The remainder of the artillery of the armored command was out on the plains between the 168th Infantry CP and DJ. KSAIRA. One company of tanks under Lt. Colonel Hightower was in SIDI BOU ZID with the armored CP. While the battle of DJ. LESSOUDA was going on there was a large troop movement, including tanks, coming toward SIDI BOU ZID from the southeast. Air bombardment was called for, but did not materialize. The armored artillery followed by the 17th Field Artillery, left their positions and withdrew to the rear. The withdrawal soon became a route in some cases. At this juncture Colonel Drake reported by telephone to General McQuillin that the troops appeared to be panicky. The general directed him, "You are on the spot, take command and stop it." Colonel Drake asked, "You mean for me to take command of all troops in the area?" General McQuillin's reply was "Yes." Steps were taken which effectively stopped the withdrawal. Troops infiltrating to the rear were stopped and held in a state of readiness. About thirty minutes after this conversation the Executive Officer, 168th Infantry, Lt Colonel Gerald Line came to where Colonel Drake was watching the battle of DJ. LESSOUDA through his field glasses and said, "General McQuillin is on the telephone and said he is pulling out and for you to stay here." Colonel Drake's instructions previously had been that he would hold his position to the last man. Colonel Drake went to the telephone but it was dead. The Communications Officer, First Lt. Edgar P. Moschel, 168th Infantry, reported that he had sent out two men to check the line. These men soon reported in and stated that they found that the telephone on the other end of the line was gone.

30. The outpost now reported an enemy column coming from the south. The enemy was flanking the position on three sides. Some of the enemy tanks had gone around DJ. LESSOUDA in a movement which cut a road junction seven miles west of DJ. LESSOUDA. All traffic leaving SIDI BOU ZID by road was now blocked. The morale of most of the men was low. Colonel Drake was repeatedly importuned if the troops should not pull out as the others had done. His reply was to the effect that he intended to attack; that it was his belief that an attack was his best defense, and that he was going to capture the high ground at GARET HADID, about a mile to the front. The enemy was coming up from both east and west and closing in. The Band, 168th Infantry, under Second Lt. Seymour R. Bolton, was immediately started forward as scouts along each side of the road leading toward GARET HADID. At this time Company A, 16th Engineers First Armored Division,

382-CCB-
in
1681R - 1 1/2 east
in olive grove
3/168 + 17FA -
DJ Ksaira
4 1/2 mi

reported to Colonel Drake. The Company Commander, Captain William R.A. Kleysteuber, 16th Engineers, said that he had been told by General McQuillin to report to Colonel Drake and there to render any assistance possible. Colonel Drake immediately sent forward this Engineer Company and Company E, of the 168th Infantry, Headquarters Company, less Dets. 168th Infantry, under Captain Bernard U. Bolton, along with several hundred men that had been picked up from units outside the regiment, in an attack to seize GARET HADID. Company E, 168th Infantry, under Captain Donald L. Wilkinson had been on duty protecting the artillery and was now available to its regimental commander after the evacuation of the artillery. Outposts were left on the road to take care of anything that came through. On the way forward to GARET HADID Colonel Drake found a platoon of light tanks returning. The lieutenant in command stated that he had been out as right flank outpost. He reported that the enemy was attacking in force with heavy tanks immediately behind him and that his instructions had been in such an event to withdraw. Colonel Drake explained to the lieutenant that he was now in command of all troops in the area and that the tanks would now be under his, Colonel Drake's orders. The platoon of light tanks was immediately launched into the attack, and the improvised force, due to its speed of advance, was successful in reaching and seizing GARET HADID before the enemy could bring sufficient force to prevent them. The remnants of Company A, 81st Reconnaissance Battalion, under Captain Otto G. Amerell, were also placed in position, as they come back. The Cannon Company, 39th Infantry, Captain "Buck" Walters commanding, and the seven 37MM Towed guns that were with Company A, 16th Engineers. The First Platoon, Company C, 109th Engineers, under First Lt. Royal I. Lee, was given the task of mining the road leading northeast around GARET HADID, while Company A of the 16th Engineers, covered the mine field at the eastern end of it. All troops made hurried preparations for a last minute defense of GARET HADID. As the troops deployed for the defense of GARET HADID, the enemy came within gun range. There was a small exchange of fire where upon the enemy deployed and then cautiously attacked. Had they gone on through the Americans would have been defeated. They did not attack in force at this time, but instead started a deliberate siege. The enemy besieged GARET HADID from all sides. By this time a check made by the Adjutant, Major Merle A. Meacham showed that about 950 men were employed in the defense of GARET HADID. About 300 of them were not armed, and these included men from tanks, reconnaissance units, tank destroyers and artillery units. Some of the men had procured side arms and guns that they had found in shot-up half-tracks. A hurried effort was made to secure arms from those found abandoned in an effort ~~was made~~ to arm everyone. This, of course, could not be done. The enemy made several attacks during the 14th, 15th and 16th of February.

31. On the 15th they began to drive in heavily and on three different occasions penetrated as far as the CP. Several snipers worked throughout the position causing casualties and constant effort to wipe them out was exerted at all times. Due to the rough ground and the several pieces of artillery picked up in the move to GARET HADID, the enemy tanks could not get into the American forces to overrun them. All of the artillery was knocked out by the 16th of February by direct fire. Casualties were heavy and finally the enemy pushed in the right flank. A counter attack with two platoons was made and drove the enemy back to his original position. A tall inverted cone of rock controlled the whole rear position. Only six men could be spared to garrison this cone. The enemy succeeded in scaling the side and killed three of these men. The other three men came back and reported that they had been driven off. Colonel Drake sent one officer, Second Lt. Seymour R. Bolten, with six men of the Regimental Band to retake this position. They did retake it and their efforts saved the entire position from being penetrated. On the 15th the situation became very desperate as there had been no food nor water since supper on the 13th; casualties were heavy, no medical assistance other than first aid could be given to the wounded. The fighting did not let up day or night and finally on the 16th the enemy was able to get through. The entire rear and right flank were driven in. Losses began to mount. During this time Colonel Drake kept in contact with the armored forces to the rear by radio using a code which had been arranged with the division Communications Officer before they went into action. The radio, however, would function only in the daytime. As soon as the sun went down the radio would fade out and there were no further communications with the outside world until the sun came up the next morning.

32. All guns of the 39th Cannon Company and all 37s were knocked out by noon 16th February. Reinforcements had been promised by the First Armored Division Headquarters, but each of the two attempts made were attacked in force by the enemy and failed to get through. Supplies were asked for by air. Ammunition was asked for but none came. Air bombardment on the numerous enemy artillery batteries in plain view was asked for but none materialized. On the 16th of February the enemy first attacked the Third Battalion, 168th Infantry, on DJ. KSAIRA. The third Battalion was to withstand the attack, although their position had become somewhat confused by the 17th Field Artillery which had moved back and forth and finally after leaving caused a collapse on their left. When the artillery moved out the Third Battalion was left in a scattered position. At 1400 hours on the 16th it became increasingly clear that the force could not hold out for more than one day longer.

33. At this hour the situation was thus: The rear of the position was driven in; the right flank was in process of being driven in; ammunition was running low; the center had been penetrated three times by tanks and the lack of water was becoming increasingly grave. The men having not eaten or had a drink of water for three days, along with the hot weather and nervous exertion, reduced many to a pitiful state.

At 1430 hours on the 16th of February 1943, Colonel Drake received a radio message from General Ward to this effect, "We can do no more for you. The decision is yours. I will try to have supplies dropped to you." The supplies were never dropped. This message which came in the clear was not understood because it presented problems which had not been in question! The orders were to hold this position. Was it intended that the decision was up to Colonel Drake, 'either to surrender, continue the defense or to withdraw'? No one was told of the contents of this message except the Communications Officer, Lt. Moschel, who received it, the radio operator, the Executive Officer, Lt. Colonel Line, the Chaplain, Stephen W. Kane, and the Commanding Officer, Colonel Drake. At 1500 hours on this date Colonel Drake received another message from General Ward, "Look for dropped message at 1700 hours." Colonel Drake assumed that they were going to order him to withdraw. He made all preparations for withdrawal that night and after a careful estimate of the situation, before which Chaplain Kane, standing in full view of enemy snipers with his hands raised in Benediction, asked the Blessing of God upon the decision, selected the route west along foot of GARET HADID, thence Southwest following the foothills until clear; thence Northwest across country to EL HAMIR. He sent a code message to Lt. Colonel John H. Van Vliet, Jr., of the Third Battalion to prepare to withdraw on order that night and then completed arrangements for the withdrawing of his own men from GARET HADID. He called a conference of his unit commanders for 1900 hours that night.

34. At about 1700 hours, three American fighter planes came over, flew directly over GARET HADID, and dropped a message on DJ. KSAIRA four and one-half miles to the north of his position, and at the point where the fighting was going on between the Third Battalion and the Germans. Fortunately the message dropped on the American Side. It was about 2000 hours before Colonel Drake got the information it contained. It was not understood how the airplanes missed GARET HADID for this location was well known and identification panels were out. The message was long and the Commanding Officer of the Third Battalion had to decode and encode it. (See Incl. No. 1 for gist of the message contained in second paragraph.) It was then forwarded to Colonel Drake. Fortunately the message did not change

any of the plans previously made. Colonel Drake was ordered to withdraw that night under cover of darkness. The route was left to his discretion. He was further ordered that all men would go to SBEITLA and that he was to be certain that each man understood that. The message added that an air umbrella would be provided and all support possible would be rendered for the withdrawal. These instructions were passed on to the unit commanders, the wounded were assembled; the most seriously wounded were placed in ambulances and the rest of the wounded were covered with canvas in the area and left under suitable medical personnel with supplies. At 2200 hours the withdrawal started. First the troops from GARET HADID leaving outposts in position, followed by the Third Battalion in column. The tires of all vehicles were slashed, magnetos and radio parts buried, all machine gun bolts were hidden and everything done to make the abandoned equipment unserviceable without creating noise which would give the withdrawal away.

35. The Third Battalion started their march from their position thirty minutes before those from GARET HADID, so as to close the distance between the units. As the Third Battalion was attempting to cross the open desert between DJ. KSAIRA, a German scout car challenged them. One of our soldiers tossed a grenade into the scout car which set it on fire and burned it up. This did not excite the Germans as there was a great deal of confusion in the area, shooting, etc. The movement was not discovered. Colonel Drake lead the column through a German tank park and bivouac area without being apprehended. They marched all night covering between 22 and 26 miles with only one rest of a few minutes at midnight. Efforts had been made to get through by radio to General Ward to find out where the rendezvous point was located. It was perfectly obvious that he could not march to SBEITLA before dawn, so he set EL HAMIR, the only high ground between SBEITLA and his position, as the rendezvous point, and hoped that help would be there to meet him at that point. At daylight EL HAMIR could be seen in front of the column about a mile away. (Many months later it was learned that the 6th Armored Infantry Garrison had been withdrawn from there the night before after the orders for the withdrawal had been given).

36. The column had become somewhat disorganized in marching and at this point proper approach formation was taken up. When the returning men attempted to cross the road into the foot hills of EL HAMRA a machine gun opened up on the right column from the hills as a German motorized column came up the road. The enemy stopped and started leaping from their trucks, while enemy tanks immediately began encircling the American column. One U. S. plane flew over at this point and opened fire on the column. Our men, with surging morale, thought it was the promised air support,

but it apparently was a long night fighter a little late getting back from its mission. One German truck was hit and set on fire. Colonel Drake immediately deployed his mixed command and opened fire with the weapons that they had. By this time there were about 400 men in the command and not more than half of them were armed. Colonel Drake asked for volunteers of an officer and men; the officer to lead the group of men to a knoll in their rear as the German Infantry was running to circle them. First Lieutenant William Rogers, Artillery Liaison Officer of the 91st Armored Artillery, volunteered to lead the twelve men and urged them to follow him. They gained the desired ground, a little knoll in the desert, and there they were able to hold the enemy off for about an hour. At the termination of the hour Lt. Rogers and all of his men had been killed.

The Germans brought up several tanks, all of them with yellow tigers painted on their sides and opened fire. They also set up machine-gun positions and supplemented that with rifle fire. While they were doing this their infantry completely encircled the small American force. After three and one-half hours of fighting the American fire power diminished and then practically ceased as the men were out of ammunition or had become casualties. Finally a German armored car bearing a white flag came dashing into the American circle. Colonel Drake ordered his men to wave the car away. When the car failed to respond he then ordered his men to fire upon the German car. Some of the men began to fire, but others could not as they had no ammunition and then they began surrendering in small groups. German tanks came in following that vehicle without any negotiations for surrender. The Germans had used the white flag as subterfuge to come inside the circle of defense without drawing fire. Their tanks closed in from all directions cutting Colonel Drake's forces into small groups. The men who did not surrender were killed by the Germans. One tank came toward Colonel Drake and a German officer pointing a rifle at him called out, "Colonel, you surrender." The Colonel replied, "You go to hell," and turned his back. He then walked away and two German soldiers with rifles followed him at a distance of about fifty yards. Colonel Drake was then stopped by a German Major who spoke good English and was asked to get in the German Major's car where he was taken to German Divisional Headquarters. Colonel Drake was taken to General Schmidt, Group Commander of the 10th and 21st Panzer Divisions at German Divisional Headquarters where the German General immediately came forward to see him, drew up at attention, saluted and said, "I want to compliment your command for the splendid fight they put up. It was a hopeless thing from the start, but they fought like real soldiers." He also stated, "I called my regimental commander, who

held you at GARET HADID this morning, and asked him how the Americans were". He replied that 'they were alright; that he hadn't heard a sound from them', and I find you back here. I am glad to have you for now I can go on to fight your comrades at SBEITLA." The German Commander promised Colonel Drake that all the American wounded would be cared for and that he could leave American medical personnel to properly look after them, but immediately upon Colonel Drake leaving the field, the American medical personnel was carried off as prisoners and the American dead and wounded left to the ravages of the Arabs who proceeded to immediately strip the dead and wounded and to beat insensible those wounded who protested to the stripping of their clothes. The American prisoners were assembled in a group and under guard marched back that afternoon and night along the road to DJ. LESSOUDA. These Americans who were slightly wounded or who became ill because of fatigue, lack of food and water and could not keep up with the column were ruthlessly bayoneted or shot. Many were walking barefooted because the Arabs had taken their shoes from them under the supervision of the German soldiers.

37. The statements of Lt. Colonel Van Vliet and First Lt. Moschel are attached to this report as inclosures No. 1 and No. 2, respectively, which cover the highlights of the report.

38. Prisoners-of-War

a. The men had been left to the systematic robbery of the German soldiers, and some junior officers, for a period of about an half hour. During this time pockets and kits were thoroughly searched, often at the point of the rifle or the bayonet presented at the unprotected belly, while watches, rings, pocketbooks, pens and all valuables were ruthlessly seized. They were then formed in a column of fours, officers at the head, and started to the rear. Three German tanks brought up the rear of the column, which was flanked by armed guards, waiting to strike, bayonet or shoot, any who for any reason straggled.

b. All day they marched through desert sands with unrelieved thirst almost unbearable. Colonel Drake appealed to the German Commander in the name of common humanity to give the men a drink of water, but was met with the statement, "We only have enough for our troops." Near midnight they were finally halted for the remaining hours of darkness. The men were herded into a circle in the open desert and there practically froze in the piercing cold of the African night.

c. At dawn, 18 February 1943, trucks came, in which the men were packed, and thus transported to SFAX where THE FIRST FOOD WAS EATEN IN FIVE DAYS! Black sawdust bread was issued them, along with water, as they were corralled into an open wired-in compound, roughly 100 yards square, and flanked by towers with machine guns in them. The men burrowed into the ground for warmth, scooping out the sand with their hands. No means whatsoever was provided for ordinary sanitation. Officers and men thrown in like pigs.

d. The next day trains were provided, 40 to 60 men in a livestock car built for eight horses. The misery, squalor and suffering endured will remain fresh in their memories. Two days and one night were used to get to SOUSSE where the men were permitted to get out for latrine purposes. During all this time no provision had been made for men to answer the calls of nature as they were kept locked in the ~~cars~~ in darkness. One day in the yards at SOUSSE and then on to TUNIS under exactly the same conditions just described.

e. At TUNIS they were turned over to the inquisitors headed by a German called "Charley" who at the "School House" amused himself by stamping an iron shod heel onto a soldier's instep or twisting his fingers while backed up by loaded and bayoneted rifles, all in an effort to obtain military information. Another method was softly saying a little trip out in the dark and the soldier's mother would never know what became of her darling boy. However, "Charley", although he had lived many years in America, was very gullible and was soon assiduously writing down fantastic stories that had no basis of fact.

f. From TUNIS the men were marched to the airport eight kilometers from the city and there most of them were transported by air in JU 52's to ITALY. Others went by water. All ended up at CAPUA, a collecting camp which stood out as a new low level. The men slept on the ground, which was dusty, and the nights were very chilly. No utensils were provided and the men procured rusty tin cans from a heap in the camp and with improvised spoons from boards which contributed proportionate dignity to the menu of cabbage water provided once daily. Two weeks of CAPUA and then they were ready to leave for the regular prison camps in Germany and Poland.

THOMAS D. DRAKE, 015384
Colonel, G.S.C., WDGS
(Formerly Commanding 168th Inf)

34th Infantry Division, Report of Operations
(Extract), Sbiba-Sbeitla Gap, 16-22 February
1943

SECTION IV - ACTION AT SBIBA - SBITLA GAP
(See operations map #2)

8. Withdrawal to ROHIA area.

a. On the night of 16-17 February the 34th Division (less CT 168 and 2nd Bn, 133d inf) was ordered to withdraw all services and artillery to the rear of the new defense line. Covering force outlined for the withdrawal were: 1st Battalion 6th Armored Division (British) which was to conceal itself in vicinity of EL ALA; 1st Battalion 133rd infantry which was ordered to move on the night 16-17 February from position South of HADJEB EL AOUN to the vicinity of KEF EL AHMAR and take up a covering position; CT 135 was ordered to hold its position and withdraw 1900 hours 17-18 February. 185th Field Artillery Battalion and 34th Reconnaissance Troop were to move 17-18 February to an area Southeast of ROHIA (O-2020).

b. During the afternoon 18 February, German armored reconnaissance elements began probing our lines North from HADJEB EL AOUN toward EL ALA and Northwest through KEF EL AHMAR but were stopped in both places. Three enemy armored cars were knocked out by "M" Company, 133rd infantry, and other vehicles were engaged at greater ranges by the 151st Field Artillery Battalion.

c. 135th infantry was attacked near PICHON, almost exactly at the hour scheduled for the withdrawal, the enemy making a slight penetration into one platoon position before being repulsed. At 1900 hours CT 135, 3rd Battalion, 133rd infantry and 151st Field Artillery began withdrawing to the ER REBEIBA - KEF EL AHMAR line.

9. Arrival in ROHIA - SBIBA area.

a. Withdrawal to KEF EL AHMAR - ER REBEIBA position had not yet been completed when XIX Corps General Operational Order Number 9 was received ordering continuation of the withdrawal during night 17-18 February to line DJ KSAIRA - DJ CHOUCHE - ESSID DRAA - BOU ROULNE (HILL 620) in order to block the general direction FONDOUK - ROHIA, and, to face Eastwards to prevent enemy access to the SBIBA Gap.

b. Division CP opened at ROHIA 1800 hours 17 February. CT 18 (18th infantry and 32nd Field Artillery Battalion) was attached to 34th Division and took up positions on line holding KEF EL KORATH on the Division right flank.

c. On 18 February all units of the Division were in their new positions. At 2000 hours Field Order Number 4 was issued to units stating that "A German reinforced Panzer Division is moving West from general vicinity of SIDI BOU ZID, and early attack can be expected." The mission of the 34th Division was to defend the SBIBA - ROHIA sector barring advance from East and South through SBIBA Gap. 1st Battalion, 135th infantry and 34th Reconnaissance Troop were held as Division reserve.

d. 19 February enemy artillery fire began falling in areas of 3rd Battalion, 135th infantry and 185th Field Artillery Battalion. Enemy units were reported detrucking and enemy tanks were observed and fired upon. Air support was requested but was not received. Enemy activity continued on 20 February with enemy detachments operating in front of 133rd infantry. At one time enemy elements penetrated to Battery "B" 185th Field Artillery and drove the cannoners from their guns. One platoon 133rd infantry counter-

attacked and the enemy forces withdrew. A tank concentration was dispersed with artillery fire. Machine gun and small arms fire was exchanged. On 21 February a "large number" of enemy tanks in an assembly area near 133rd Infantry were dispersed by artillery fire.

10. Withdrawal to New Defense Line.

a. Pursuant to orders from XIX Corps (French), 34th Division Field Order Number 5 issued at 0930 hours 22 February ordered units to withdraw on the night 22-23 February to defensive line running Northeast - Southwest along wadi just South of SBIBA. Movements were completed to new positions and gaps in mine fields on the main SBIBA - ROHIA road were closed before dawn.

b. On the afternoon of 23 February the enemy appeared to be withdrawing along our front, and Regimental Commanders were ordered to send out reconnaissance parties to positions occupied the previous day and to be prepared to move forward promptly on order. Later in the day a XIX Corps message stating the "Enemy appears to be withdrawing THALA pocket. Launch strong reconnaissance very aggressively with tanks and guns on SBIBA - SBEITLA and SBIBA - EL ALA axis. Be ready to follow up with more important elements."

11. Reconnaissance in Force.

a. First Army message received 0340 hours 24 February stated "Bring strong pressure tomorrow on enemy's right flank." In accordance with this order a force consisting of 34th Reconnaissance Troop with French mechanized units attached, and a supporting force consisting of 2nd Battalion, 135th Infantry with French tank units attached, under command of Lt. Col. H. F. Wulf, and generally referred to as "Wulf's Force," was ordered to make an immediate reconnaissance South from SBIBA toward SBEITLA and East from SBIBA in the direction of EL ALA.

b. Wulf's Force was assembled about one half mile South of SBIBA. Its first mission was in clearing roads of mines and booby traps. To assist in this work a detachment of mine personnel was added from the 109th Engineer Battalion. The Germans had blown all bridges behind them in their retreat and had laid mines in fields adjacent to blown bridges. Arabs were burning and looting the town of SBIBA, cutting telephone wires and signaling to the West from SBIBA. The attached French were dispatched to handle the Arabs. They shot some and took others prisoners.

c. Patrols operated to the East and South of SBIBA during the night of 24-25 February and at 1300 hours on the following day had reached a point seven miles South of SBIBA without making contact with enemy. Another patrol passed through KEF EL AHMAR and observed no enemy.

12. Advance Towards SBEITLA.

a. Message received at 1850 hours 25 February from II Corps read: "Effective midnight 25-26 February 34th Division (less CT 168) comes under command of II Corps." 813th Tank Destroyer Battalion was attached to 34th Division. It was at once assigned to mission for anti-tank defense and took up positions as selected by Lt. Colonel Walker to accomplish the mission. One Tank Destroyer Company was dispatched to join Wulf's Force near SBIBA.

b. On 27 February Wulf's Force was directed to contact Combat Command "B" of the 1st Armored Division which was moving East Towards SBEITLA. This was accomplished when SBEITLA was reached and found to be free of enemy. One company of Wulf's Force also occupied Pass at T-1590 on 1 March. On 2 March Wulf's Force disbanded and units reverted to organization control. Their mission had been accomplished with the occupation of SBEITLA.

c. On 2 March the 751st Tank Battalion was attached to the 34th Division. This organization remained with the Division throughout the SOUTHERN TUNISIAN campaign. On 3 March the detachment of eight officers and two hundred and thirty enlisted men loaned to the I and VI Commando (Br) returned to the Division. The officers and enlisted men of this detachment had been previous members of CT 168, who had voluntarily joined the British 1st and 6th Commando organizations while in Scotland. They had participated in the Eastern Assault Force landing at ALGIERS on 8 November 1942.

d. On 4 March the Derby Yeomanry (Br) was attached to the Division for tactical employment. This reconnaissance regiment is organically a part of the British 6th Armored Division. It was given the mission of patrolling south of the SBEITLA - HADJEB EL AOUN. The 109th Medical Battalion was strafed by enemy aircraft on 4 March. Six men were wounded.

13. Demonstration toward PICHON.

a. Orders were received on 4 March from First Army directing II Corps to send a demonstration force in the direction of PICHON on the EL ALA - PICHON axis: ("Enemy forces PICHON - FONDOUK - KALBOUAN are thinned out to furnish forces to attack and capture MEDJEZ in north. Direct Ryder 34th Division to make counter demonstration direction EL ALA - PICHON. Present limit advance PICHON. Force to be employed 1 battalion infantry motorized reinforced with 1 company tanks and artillery. Entire battalion tanks to accompany force part way but only one company continues on with force. Operation to be coordinated with Koeltz, Commanding General French XIX Corps. Desire operation to begin as soon as possible.") In accordance therewith 34th Division Field Order Number 14 Ordered: 3rd Battalion, 135th Infantry to move by marching to vicinity of ER REBEIBA and at 0620 hours 5 March to move on PICHON; 751st Tank Battalion, one battery, 107th Coast Artillery Battalion, 125th Field Artillery Battalion, one company, 813th Tank Destroyer Battalion and 34th Reconnaissance Troop, to move on the night of 4-5 March to vicinity of ER REBEIBA; one company, 133rd Infantry (reinf) to occupy pass KEF EL AHMAR supported by one battery 151st Field Artillery Battalion; Special Detachment, 34th Division, to seize and hold DJ TROZZA on night 4-5 March.

b. General Gaffey commander of the Demonstration Force reported that at 0700 hours 5 March movement was proceeding as scheduled with no enemy contact. The Force advanced rapidly despite the mines and booby traps and at 1000 hours contacted enemy armored reconnaissance cars, which withdrew to position North and south of PICHON.

c. General Gaffey reported at 1640 hours 5 March north slopes of DJ TROZZA occupied by our troops, and that DJ TROZZA was cleared of enemy. The mission of making a demonstration in the direction of PICHON had been accomplished, and General Ryder, on orders from Commanding General II Corps (US), ordered the return of the Force. Withdrawal behind our lines was completed by 1200 hours 6 March. For special report on PICHON operation see Part 7, Section XIII.

Combat Team 26, Unit Report, 18-24 February
1943, and 26th Infantry, Unit History, 18-24 Feb-
ruary 1943

CT 26 (-) UNIT REPORT

From: Feb 18, 1943
To : Feb 24, 1943

Morsott, Tunisia
22nd April 1943.

KASSERINE OPERATION:

MAPS: #10,13 Tunisia 1/200,000.

1. ENEMY:

- a. Units in contact: 21st Panzer Division and the 7th Bersaglier.
- b. Enemy reserves that can effect our situation: No knowledge.
- c. Brief description of enemy activity during period covered by report:
(see copy of unit journal attached hereto.)
- d. Brief estimate of enemy strength, material means, morale, and his probable knowledge of our situation: No estimate possible under the circumstances.
- e. Conclusions covering plans open to the enemy, which can effect our mission: Enemy had successfully taken the Kasserine Pass, and was in position to threaten Thala.

2. OWN SITUATION:

- a. See attached overlay.
- b. See attached overlay.
- c. See attached overlay.
- d. Brief outline of operations during period: Impossible to do justice to report of operations in brief outline (see Copy of Regimental History attached to this report).
- e. Combat efficiency of command at end of operation: This estimate included only the 1st Battalion, 26th Inf, Cannon Co 26th Inf and 35d FA.
 - (1) Losses in officers & men (see paragraph 3 b. this report).
 - (2) Morale low.
 - (3) Ability to continue further active operation very limited due to disorganized units, status of supply and physical condition of personnel.
- f. Results of operations during period:
 - (1) That proper appreciation of terrain in relation to troops and time available must be considered at all times, which in this case was not possible (see Reg. History).
 - (2) That communications are vital to speedily coordinate the various units that was placed under OT control.

3. ADMINISTRATIVE:

- a. Status of command: 1st Bn understrength. Cannon Co up to T/O strength.

3. b. Casualties:

| | | |
|-----|------------|-------------------|
| KIA | 2 Officers | 4 Enlisted men. |
| WIA | 3 Officers | 32 Enlisted men. |
| MIA | 4 Officers | 115 Enlisted men. |

- c. Prisoners captured: (see unit journal attached hereto).
- d. Evacuation carried out under extremely adverse conditions.
- e. Locations of supply and evacuation establishment: See attached overlay.
- f. Supply: At end of operation, ration, water, ammunition, gas & oil very low.
- g. Condition of roads: From Thala to Kasserine Pass, road excellent. Lateral roads to either side of pass difficult to travel due to large wadi in middle of open plain.

4. GENERAL: Such pertinent comments regarding the situation not covered elsewhere in the report: Attention is invited to Copy of Regimental History attached hereto.

For the Regimental COMMANDER:

OFFICIAL:

JOSEPH J. KOHOUT,
Captain 26th Inf.,
PERSONNEL ADJUTANT.

JOHN C. KELLY,
Captain 26th Inf.,
ADJUTANT:

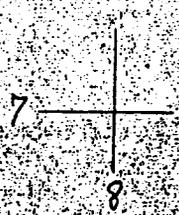
INCLS: Situation overlay.
Regimental History.
Unit Journal

MAPS: 10, 13, TUNIS. 1/200,000.

| | |
|---|---|
| N | O |
| S | T |

4-26
5 THMS FRONT LINE
PLUS BAND 26
GRAB FOR
RE-DIVISION

4-26
4-26
4-26
4-26



UNIT REPORT: CT 26 (21 639 BNS SERVIC. RT Co (H))

A FRONT LINE OR MOST ADVANCED ELEMENTS

B LOCATION OF TROOPS, CPS, BOUNDARIES ETC

C LOCATION OF ADJACENT UNITS

HEADQUARTERS TWENTY SIXTH INFANTRY
APO# 1, United States Army

REGIMENTAL HISTORY - KASSERINE OPERATION.

February 18, 1943. -- Consolidation of the EL MA EL ABOID position was carried out; at 2100 a hours CT 26 Headquarters ONLY was ordered to move to the KASSERINE PASS.

February 19, 1943. -- At 2400 hours of the 18th, the CT 26 Hqs only moved to Kasserine Pass to organize that position, arriving there at 0730 hours. The enemy had already started its attack. The CT 26 took over command from Colonel Moore of the 19th Engineers. One platoon of Company "A" 26th Infantry was on the high ground on the left, while the rest of the 1st battalion 26th Infantry was on the low ground in the middle of the pass. On the 1st Bn's right were three companies of the 19th Engrs, which also occupied part of the high ground on the right. One company of the 19th Engrs was in the rear of the three Engr companies, serving as a reserve. The main road, and later bothroads leading to the pass, was mined. The moment the CT26 arrived, Colonel Stark(CT Comdr) pulled another platoon of Company "A" 26th Inf, and sent it to join the platoon on the high ground on the left. Col Stark ordered the Engineers to move to the high ground on the right side of the pass, if that was at all possible. At the time it was impossible to pull the troops on the low ground in the pass and put them on the high ground where they should have been. The 33d FA Bn was sent into position as close as possible to the pass to bring all its fire on the pass. A deep wadi almost split the pass and ran straight up the pass northwest into the rising foothills in the rear. The only possible crossing over this wadi was about five miles to the rear. This created two distinct sectors and made it impossible to transfer troops from one side to the other since the entire area was covered by fire.

At about 1705 hours the 3d Bn, 39th Infantry plus the AT Co, 39th Inf., began moving into the left sector in a more or less piece-meal fashion. At this stage of the game the troops on the right half of the sector were nearly surrounded. Col Stark sent Co "I" 39th Inf immediately to the highest ground on the right half of the sector, with one-half of Co "K" 39th Inf. Co "L" 39th Inf was sent to reinforce the two platoons of Co "A" 26th Infantry on the left. The remainder of Co 39th Inf was echeloned forward in depth on the left. The left rear a likely avenue of approach for the enemy was guarded by the 26th Infantry Band and five tanks of Co "I" 13th Armd Regt. The tanks had the dual mission of keeping an eye on the left flank and of reinforcing the pass should the enemy break through with mechanized forces. The remainder of the tanks of Co "I" 13th AR. plus what was left of the 805th TD Bn, after the Feriana engagement was placed near the entrance of the pass on the right. Two tracks of Cannon Co 26th Inf with mounted 75's were placed on the right to reinforce the tanks and the T. D.'s. Two more 75's later joined them, these four guns constituting the entire force the 26th Inf., Cannon Co could muster after its losses in previous engagements. The CP was moved from the left sector to a middle-line position in the wadi at about 2000 A hours.

During the night the troops on the low ground were entirely surrounded as were to a certain extent the troops on the right and left. Orders were given that in case of complete encirclement all troops would join troops on the high ground in their respective sectors. During the day we inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy but we suffered numerous casualties ourselves from rifle-machinegun- and artillery fire. At least seven enemy armored vehicles were destroyed by our armored vehicles. During the night of Feb 19-20th the tanks were distributed equally in both sectors. They were echeloned in depth, with orders to guard the pass. What was left of the 805th TD was ordered to the left sector with the same mission as the tanks.

14-00000
CLASSIFICATION CANCELLED
SECRETARY ARMY
DATE 2-28-76
BY 9478 Bgm/1/12/ACB
REPRODUCED AT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVE

February 20, 1943. -- During the early hours of morning, between 0100 and 0300 A hours, Colonel Wells, 3d Bn 6th Armd Inf Regt, reported to Colonel Stark for orders. English Brigadier Dumfries and Colonel conferred and decided to counter-attack as soon as the two forces could be coordinated. This attack was to be launched on the left side of the sector as it promised the best chance of success, and also, if successful, gave us the ground which actually dominated the pass. The time tentatively set for this combined American-British counter-attack was 1100 A hours. At about 0800 A hours that morning Colonel Stark received word that Brigadier Dumfries had stated his forces forward without notifying Colonel Stark. Colonel Stark immediately sent the 3d Bn 6th AIR to assist the British. The British force consisted of 16 tanks and about 90 men of what they term a "rifle brigade". The British were too slow as the 6th AIR Bn caught up with them and was forced to remain behind them while they milled about. The British lost their 16 tanks and their infantry gained practically no high ground. The 6th AIR Bn pushed in, but was unable to join Co "A" 26th Inf and Co "L" 39th Inf. To a certain extent the British did support this attack with mortar and artillery fire. The 33d FA Bn and the supporting heavy guns of the TD's and the 26th Inf Cannon Co were only able to contribute small amount of aid inasmuch as the British upset the apple-cart by jumping the gun. The cautious British advance and their milling-around gave the enemy an opportunity to establish artillery OP's and practically look down our throats. Starting at about 1400 A hours and lasting throughout the night the enemy artillery beat a tattoo along the left side of the sector. At about 1830 A hours the British Brigadier or his superior ordered a withdrawal of the counter-attacking force. They withdrew up the road leading to Thala and established a defensive position about five miles to the southeast of Thala. The 894th TD Bn was ordered to guard the right sector of the pass with two companies echeloned in depth while one ~~more~~ company was sent to the left sector to do the same. During the afternoon of Feb 20th what infantry troops had dribbled down from the foothills on the right were reformed and sent to the high ground on the right with orders to hold until relieved by CCB. This group included infantry, engineers and other strays.

After a conference with the British (chief of staff, 1st Army) it was decided to attack with what was left of the British force plus a large reinforcement of British infantry and tanks and what was left of the 26th Infantry. This attack was to restore the left sector of the Kasserine Pass. This thrust was to be coordinated with that of CCB of the 1st Armd Div, which force was attacking to restore the right side of the pass.

When the British withdrew from the left sector the CT26 was holding the bag on both sectors. The only troops in CT26 not surrounded or actively engaged were remnants of Co "I" 13th AR tanks, the remainder of the 805th TD Bn and a new TD Bn the 894th TD Bn which arrived on the afternoon of Feb 20th. What was left of Co "A" 26th Inf and Co "L" 39th Inf was still on the high ground on the left. The remnants of the 19th Engrs and the 1st Bn 26th Inf was still on the high ground on the right. These units were completely surrounded and their position was critical. The troops on the left were given orders to hold. The troops on the right were to hold until relieved or until contact was made with CCB. The 33d FA Bn was given orders to fall back to the foothills and stop any enemy advance over the plains. Eventually the majority of the foot troops on the right; although completely surrounded fell back to the foothills to the northwest and came under command of CCB. The troops on the high ground on the left (Co "A" 26th Inf, Co "L" 39th Inf) stayed in that position during the night of Feb 20th and the greater part of the following day although small groups drifted back.

About 1740 A hours of Feb 20th, Col Stark received orders that his force was placed under command of the British. The British did not contact Col Stark, and he set out to contact them himself. This he did about midnight, when he saw Brigadier Dumfries. In short, the British had withdrawn without notifying Col Stark who was left with both sectors. The CP of the 26th CT moved out of the wadi in which it was stationed at about 1915 A hours, from which place it went to the field train bivouac. At this time the CP was in danger of being captured by infiltrating enemy patrols, whose movements could be seen and heard closing in on the CP. There were no friendly troops in front of the CP which could be called upon to help defend the position, but the moving of the CP was held up to the last possible moment so that the staff could meet Col Stark who had left the CP to contact and inform the British of the latest development in his sector.

February 21, 1943. -- The CT26 was ordered into reserve by the CG, 1st Armd Div., and it established a CP two kilometers south of Thala. Re-assembling and reorganizing of the 1st Bn was begun. Later in the day the Bn was moved into an assembly position south of Kalaa Djerda (N7512) and the CP was moved into a wooded area west of Thala (N8108).

Feb 22, 1943 -- The CP moved back to the 1st Bn assembly position south of Kalaa Djerda; the CT26 was still in reserve. Re-equipping and reorganizing the 1st Bn was carried out.

Feb 23, 1943. -- Still in reserve, the CT26 received message from the CG, 1st Armd Div to alert unit for possible movement. Word was received from Lt. Grady that he was attempting to rejoin the CT26 with the one platoon of Co "A" 26th Inf. which had been established on the high ground 15 miles to the left of Kasserine Pass. Lt Grady was instructed to move north to Kalaa Djerda.

Feb 24, 1943 -- The CT26 was ordered to move to EL MA EL ABOID to defend the pass there. Orders from the 1st Inf Div placed Col Stark in charge of forces in that area. The CT26 arrived at 0630 hours.

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9th Infantry Division Artillery, Narrative of
Events, Thala Engagement, 21-24 February 1943

4 March 1943.

SUBJECT: Narrative of Events. Thala Engagement - 21-24 February, 1943.

TO : Commanding General, 9th Infantry Division, APO #9.

The 9th Division Artillery was bivouaced in the vicinity of Tlemcen, Algeria, when on Wednesday, 17 February, 1943 at 1030, orders were received attaching the 60th and 47th Infantry Cannon Companies and ordering the movement of the Division Artillery (less the 26th Field Artillery Battalion) to march immediately by forced marches to the vicinity of Tebessa, Algeria. Brigadier General S. LeRoy Irwin, Commanding General, issued orders for the move at 1100 and at 1600 Wednesday, 17 February, 1943, the convoy crossed the I.P. at the East edge of Tlemcen. The 84th Field Artillery Battalion and the 47th Infantry Cannon Company joined the Division Artillery at L'Arba, Algeria, at 1515 Friday, 19 February, and the entire convoy proceeded to Tebessa, Algeria, arriving there at 1410 Sunday, 21 February, 1943 -- a march of 735 miles over mountainous terrain in 4 days under very difficult weather conditions.

At Tebessa orders were received to immediately continue the march to the vicinity of Thala, Tunisia, and occupy positions. This order was received at 1530, Sunday, 21 February, 1943. The Commanding General immediately went forward on reconnaissance after ordering the Battalion Commanders to follow at once with their Battalion Parties and report to him at 1900 at Kala Jerda, Tunisia, prepared to reconnoiter positions. The General and a reduced staff proceeded to the VII Corps Headquarters at Dj Korf, Tunisia. There orders were received placing the 9th Division Artillery and attached units (less the 26th Field Artillery Battalion) in support of the British Army Forces commanded by Brigadier Nicholson, who were resisting the German drive South of Thala. General Irwin contacted the British Commander at Thala, Tunisia, at 2000, Sunday, 21 February, 1943, and with him made plans for the defense of the positions South of Thala. The Battalion Commanders reported at Thala and were ordered by General Irwin to reconnoiter and occupy positions as soon as possible with the objective of firing in defense of the positions at daylight 22 February, 1943.

The Battalions occupied positions as shown on the attached sketch. The 47th Cannon Company was attached to the 34th Field Artillery Battalion and given the mission of defending their right flank against possible enemy tank attacks. The 60th Cannon Company was attached to the 60th Field Artillery Battalion and given the mission of defending the right flank of the 60th Field Artillery Battalion from enemy tank attack.

At the time the 9th Division Artillery entered the action the British Forces consisted of 3 platoons of 2/5 Lesters holding a line across the road

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South of Thala (as shown on the sketch) supported by; The 26 Armored Group, consisting of 24 tanks of the English Mark IV type; 22 British 25 $\frac{1}{2}$ guns; 12 Bofors A.A. guns; 2 Batteries Anti-Tank guns; and 12 light Tank Destroyer guns.

The enemy forces at this time were estimated to be the remnants of the 21st Panzer Division, consisting of approximately 40 medium tanks, 2 to 3 battalions of infantry, 3 batteries of 105 millimeter guns, a battery of 150mm howitzers, several 88 millimeter dual purpose AA - AT guns, and a considerable amount of anti-aircraft guns.

When the 9th Division Artillery entered the engagement the enemy had been vigorously pushing forward, having breached the Kasserine Pass and advanced to a line approximately six kilometers South of Thala, Tunisia by 2300 Sunday, 21 February, 1943. During the night there was very little action except for occasional harassing rounds of artillery fire, and a small counter-attack by tanks of the 6th Armored Division.

The early morning hours of Monday, 22 February, were spent in occupying and preparing positions and at 0500 all units were in position ready to fire. General Irwin had established a forward command post near the command post of the British Tank Commander. At daylight registration was started but was not accomplished until later in the day. All batteries of the 60th Field Artillery Battalion and the 84th Field Artillery Battalion fired throughout the morning on targets of opportunity, most of these targets being enemy tanks. At 0945, "C" Battery, 84th Field Artillery Battalion occupied anti-tank positions on the Thala-Kasserine road in an exposed position. Enemy artillery and direct laying weapons immediately opened fire. "C" Battery returned the fire until three of their guns were knocked out. The fire of "C" Battery knocked out at least one enemy gun. The pieces were taken out of position and removed to their original position at which point they were able to repair one gun.

Shelling of the positions and of the observation points were continuous throughout the day. Very little damage was done compared with the number of rounds fired by the enemy. The guns of all units of the 9th Division Artillery fired with very good results on the enemy positions throughout the day. Morale of the men was high even though they had not slept for more than 24 hours.

The combined efforts of the British and American artillery definitely halted the advance and when night fell the lines held by both sides were much the same as they had been in the morning. During the day the action had been limited to a tank battle in the early morning followed by an artillery duel continuing throughout the day. This was due to the very small amount of infantry present. In the afternoon our positions were strafed and bombed several times by a small flight of enemy planes. Damage was very slight, one gun being damaged and 3 men killed. Our planes came over later and bombed the enemy. At dark action ceased on both sides.

During the night there was practically no action. Several times during the night unidentified planes were overhead but no bombs were dropped nor were the planes fired on. Some explosions were heard coming from the enemy lines.

At daylight 23 February, 1943, the action began by firing of the British tanks. Our guns fired for sometime on targets of opportunity. During the morning the battalions fired several division artillery concentrations. All battalions continued to fire during the morning on any target available. There was very little action from the enemy. At 1445 all firing ceased in order to let reconnaissance parties advance. The reconnaissance proved that the enemy had retreated and the British Forces moved forward. No further contact with the enemy was made and the action ceased at dark. At 0600, 24 February, 1943 the reconnaissance parties reached the Esserine Pass and no contact had been made. This ended the engagement.

Statistics of the engagement are as follows:

| | KILLED | EVAQUATED WOUNDED | DUTY WOUNDED | MISSING IN ACTION | TOTAL |
|----------------------|----------|----------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------|
| 34th F.A. Bn. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 60th F.A. Bn. | 2 | 15 | 8 | 0 | 25 |
| 84th F.A. Bn. | 6 | 10 | 3 | 1 | 20 |
| Hq Btry 9th Div Arty | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 47th Cannon Co. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 60th Cannon Co. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Totals | 8 | 25 | 11 | 1 | 45 |

Vehicular casualties were as follows:

| | 1/4 T O&R | 3/4 T O&R | 2-1/2 T GMC | TOTAL |
|----------------------|-----------|-----------|-------------|----------|
| 34th F.A. Bn. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 60th F.A. Bn. | 1 | 2 | 0 | 3 |
| 84th F.A. Bn. | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Hq Btry 9th Div Arty | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 47th Cannon Co. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 60th Cannon Co. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Totals | 2 | 2 | 1 | 5 |

The ammunition expended is as follows:

| | | |
|-----------------|-------------|----------------|
| 34th F.A. Bn. | 100 rounds | 155 # Howitzer |
| 60th F.A. Bn. | 1028 rounds | 105 # Howitzer |
| 84th F.A. Bn. | 764 rounds | 105 # Howitzer |
| 47th Cannon Co. | 0 rounds | 75 # Howitzer |
| 60th Cannon Co. | 12 rounds | 75 # Howitzer |

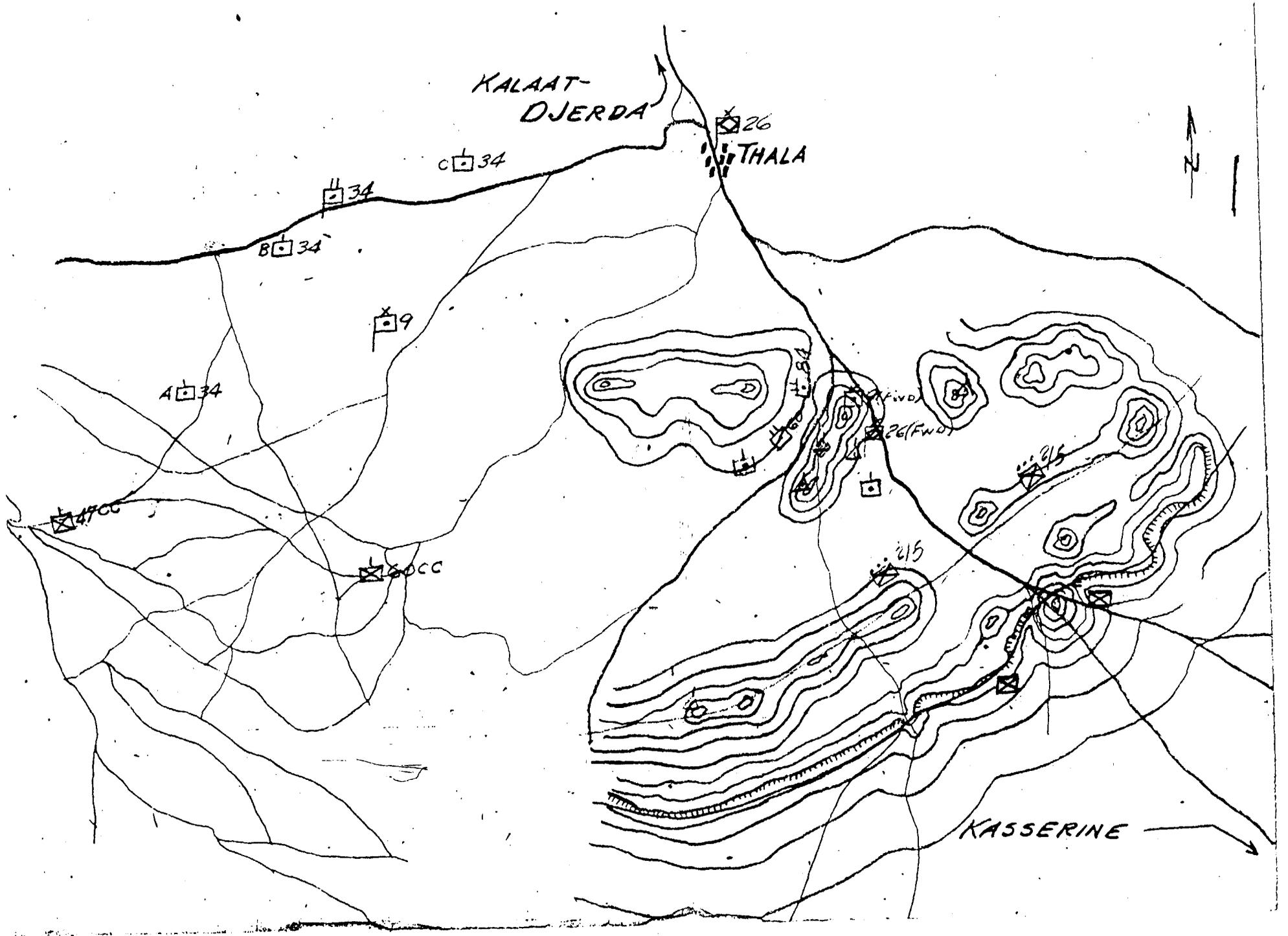
Four guns were damaged at one time and were removed to the rear areas. These guns were only slightly damaged and were back ready for action in 2 or 3 days.

Considering the amount of shell fire received the casualties were very light. The morale of the men was very high and the retreat of the Germans gave all men an increased confidence. The experience gained will be of great

value in future engagements. The level of performance of all men and officers was exceptionally high. There was not one straggler, and, in spite of the heavy concentration of enemy artillery fire on battery positions and OP's, the division artillery was never neutralized, a fine demonstration of courage and coolness on the part of all ranks.

For the Artillery Commanders:

Evert E. Stong
EVERT E. STONG,
Major, Field Artillery,
8-3.



21st Panzer Division, Mission Change for 19
February 1943 and Division Order No. 6, 20 Feb-
ruary 1943

Radio Message from

21st Pz.Div.

to

Pz. A.O.K.

18 February '43 2205 h.

1. Mission of 21st Pz.Div. for 19 Feb. '43:

- Mopping up and security of the area gained
- a. ~~The area gained will be mopped up and made secure~~
 - b. Establishment of a reconnaissance base in Kasserine for the relief of A.O.K. elements

2. Final report of 5th Pz.Rgt. from 14 - 18 Feb.

103 tanks destroyed, 2 tanks General Sherman ready for action captured; no total loss of tanks on our side.

Sources:

Anlagenband 9 zum Schlachtbericht der Pz.Armees Afrika Ia.

12.2.43 - 23.2.43

34 375/11

Division Order No. 6

1. Enemy resistance at Sbibba has become considerably stronger since 19 Feb. On 20 Feb. 9 enemy batteries including 3 medium and 1 heavy, were ascertained. Around noon, especially strong artillery fire activity. There is a possibility that the enemy is passing to active defense or to the attack.
2. 21st Panzer Div. will break off the attack launched on Sbibba and will pass to the defensive in the general line 5348 - 5353 - 5373, utilizing the enemy mine fields.
3. Main line of resistance: low ground between 5358 - 5353 - hills just northwest of 5353 - ridge 2 km south of 5374 - north slope of Hill 752.
4. The following units will be put in line under the control of the commander of the Pz.Gren.Rgt. 104 A in his capacity of infantry commander:
- Panzer Gren.Rgt. 104 A
Flak Bn. 609
1 light, 1 medium battery, 155th Arty.Rgt.
2 medium, 1 light battery, 2d Bn., 25th Flek.
5. The 580th Recon.Bn. will block the pass at ~~5347~~ 5347, thereby protecting the right flank of the defense position.
- 580th Recon.Bn. will reconnoiter as far as the line 5340 - 5356 - 5370 - 5368 - 5367 - 5602.
6. Conduct of operations in the main defensive area: the mass of heavy infantry weapons will go into covered firing position making the greatest possible use of flanking fire so that no hostile infantry can cross over the main line of resistance established through the ridge.

Antitank artillery will be put in line on the forward slope of the ridge located at the rear of the main line of resistance with main effort against the passages not protected against mechanized attacks.

All the flak combat troops will be put in line overlapping for antitank protection; for commitment they will come under the control of the artillery commander.

7. Artillery: the artillery commander will bring the artillery in position in such a way that its concentrated fire can be effective against the possible directions of advance of the enemy. Concentration fire areas will be fired for calibration. Cooperation between the batteries and Pz.Gren. Rgt. 104 A will be regulated directly between the artillery commander and the commander of the Pz.Gren.Rgt. 104.

8. Panz.Eng.Bn.220 will intensify the mining of the main line of resistance by adding to the British mines in the first line and by increasing the number of German mines. The mines will ^{be} laid in greater quantity at the points not protected against mechanized attacks.

The mining of the wide trail from Shibba to Sbeitla with additional German or British mines will be prepared.

9. The 5th Panz.Rgt. will assemble in the area southwest of 5353 at the disposal of the division and will be ready to march within 6 hours to proceed in a southern direction. Moreover the commitment of the regiment for a counterthrust against enemy tanks which may break through will be considered.

10. Flak Bn.609 will be placed under the control of the commander of the Pz.Gren.Rgt. 104 A for commitment in the main defensive area.

12. Signal Bn.200 will connect the divisional C.P. with the C.P.'s of

Pz.Gren.Rgt 104 A
Art.Rgt. 155
Pz.Rgt.5
Flak Bn.609
Pz.Eng.Bn.220
2d Bn., 25th Flak

T.C.

(By wire)

11. The 2d Bn., 25th Flak will take over the flak protection of the rear main defensive area from the positions 4 - 6 km south of 5374.

Main effort: air ~~protection~~ defense.

provision will be made for

In addition/the possibility of repulsing enemy tanks from the firing positions ~~xxxxx~~.

13. Divisional C.P. at 5376 (identified from the main trail) (has still to be reconnoitered)

Source:

21st Pz.Div. Ia
Kriegstagebuch Anlagen No.9 8.1.43 - 31.3.43

33 135/2